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BENTLEY PRIORY.

BY

MRS. HASTINGS PARKER.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

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BENTLEY PRIORY.

CHAPTER I.

It is amazing the extent of self-command to which the natural pride of woman will in many cases enable her to attain. Let me not be misunderstood. I mean not pride in its ordinary sense, but that better feeling which whispers that, in struggling against the weakness of her own heart, and in jealously veiling from every eye the painful effort that struggle often costs her,

she sustains not alone her own pure and high dignity, but that of her sex in general. Women have three defences whereon to rest in the hour of danger. The best—the strongest—the only never-failing —is principle. The second is a cultivated mind. An empty head is rarely a strong citadel. The third is womanly pride, which, in the sense here implied, is far from being an unamiable feeling. It is one, perhaps, which none but a woman can fully comprehend, but there are few women that have not at some one period of their lives experienced it.

It was this that enabled Emily Morton to maintain her habitual ease and grace of manner, as the ceremony of presentation to Mrs. Thornham was performed by Lady Wrexham, and then, after having addressed

Mandeville in her usual tone, to turn from him and exchange a few sentences appropriate to the occasion with her new acquaintances. Mandeville, too, though his frame of mind was scarcely more enviable than her own, was nevertheless equally unembarrassed. No one could have dreamed that he was in the least discomposed. He was too much a man of the world to permit any emotion to manifest itself unless when occasion required it. Blanche also, infected perhaps by the calmness of his manner, or the fascination of Emily's, had entirely recovered herself, and was chatting gaily with Lady Wrexham of pleasures past and pleasures in perspective. In the discussion of these it was very natural that Mrs. Thornham should be referred to, and thus her at-

tention was very soon diverted from her conversation with Emily, into listening to the various plans for her own and her daughter's amusement. Mandeville seized the first moment to speak.

"I fancied you still at the Grange," said he, drawing close to Emily's side.

"We returned yesterday."

"But you were to have remained till to-morrow."

"Yes; but grandfather is suffering from one of his fits of gout, and he always prefers being alone when that is the case. We came back just in time for Lady Langley's concert."

"You were at Lady Langley's last night?" inquired Mandeville, in surprise.

"Yes."

The little conclave with Lady Wrexham

at its head was just then deep in the discussion of a projected pic-nic. Mandeville gazed at Emily for a moment in silence, and then seized the occasion to whisper a few words in a tone so low as to be audible only to an ear accustomed, as was hers, to catch every sound in its softest modulations.

"You are better, I hope, to-day, Miss Morton," said a voice at that moment, at the other side. It was that of Lord Errington; and Emily, turning, replied to his inquiry with an animation such as she had never before evinced.

"Carina," said Lady Wrexham, turning to Emily at the very moment that Mandeville was about to utter the inquiry suggested by Lord Errington's words, "we are going to walk on a little. Blanche

tells me that she has not yet been the round of the gardens, and it is beautifully cool now—will you come? " And as Emily very gladly assented, the whole party moved on, Lord Errington retaining his place by her side, while Blanche, though attended likewise by Sir Geoffrey Charlton, seemed by general consent to be made over to the charge of Mandeville. It was, in fact, perfectly in accordance with the rules of politeness that her self-elected *cicerone* should delegate to no one the coveted task of amusing the beautiful heiress.

For the first time in his life Mandeville was piqued. He had never really loved any woman but Emily Morton. It was not merely her beauty that had attracted him. He admired her for something better; and

had it been possible for him to do so, he would have unhesitatingly selected her as his wife from among thousands. Neither had it been for mere pastime that he had striven to win her affections. He felt that they were worth the winning; and he prized the treasure as it deserved when won—for that it *was* won, Mandeville knew as well as though the confession had already escaped her lips. He could not of course be acquainted with the various emotions by which she had been agitated during the last four-and-twenty hours, but at one glance he perceived that all was not as it had been. However skilfully Emily fancied that she had played her part, she could not deceive *him*. Poor child, the assumption of indifference was a task too recently commenced to be effectually

accomplished. She had yet to learn that a demeanour tutored into composure, or a countenance tortured into calmness, is, to a practised eye, the veriest traitor of the throbbing heart within. Total indifference is always perfectly natural and unembarrassed. Feelings that are assumed are never so.

Mandeville's first impression, after the unexpected meeting in the gardens, and his subsequent observation of Emily's change of manner, was one of surprise; for though the occurrences of the past week rose up with something very like self-accusation before him, yet how could she, returned but the evening before from the country, have divined the history of his movements, and the soft nothings wherewith he had beguiled the period of her absence. His next

feeling was one of uneasiness, but that quickly gave place to an inward smile, as Emily's manner unconsciously revealed to him the deep hold he still possessed on her affections; and yet, despite all his convictions, despite all his efforts, Mandeville was piqued, doubly piqued at the calmness of Emily's demeanour towards himself, and the unusual animation of her manner towards Lord Errington. In all those points generally considered of vast importance in matrimonial speculations, Lord Errington would be a formidable rival—quite sufficiently formidable to make Mandeville resolve to set matters right between himself and Emily with the least possible delay. And just as he had come to this conclusion, and had listened to the question and answer relating to her indisposition of the pre-

ceding evening, without at all comprehending what it was all about, and in fact was beginning to feel much more uncomfortable than he had ever felt before in his life, he had the satisfaction of seeing Emily walk away, apparently very well pleased, with his lordly cousin, while he himself was left, as a matter of course, to take care of la bella Bianca, to whom he was perfectly aware that rumour had very generally assigned him as an accepted suitor.

"So be it, mademoiselle," was Mandeville's next reflection, as he observed Emily talking with some animation to Lord Errington, a thing she had never done in her life before. "Pique and repique—two can play at the same game. Let us see who will weary of it the soonest;" and in pursuance of his

resolution, Mandeville adopted his usual tone and manner with Blanche Thornham, while Emily was conversing in her own quiet, lady-like way, with Lord Errington yes, conversing—for Lord Errington *could* converse, though it was rarely that anybody heard him do so.

There was not a word, not a movement, either of Mandeville or of Miss Morton, that was not closely watched, and distinctly visible to each; and yet, who that had seen the perfectly disengaged manner of both could have guessed how entirely their thoughts were preoccupied? There was, however, one distinction between them: with him the deception was perfect. Emily believed all that her worst fears had suggested; and though the conviction served to strengthen her previous resolutions, though

it roused her woman's pride, and nerved her to persevere in stifling every trace of wounded feeling, yet both the conviction and the effort cost her a more bitter pang than she had ever before experienced. But with Mandeville it was different. He did not for a moment dream of Emily's preference for Lord Errington, or of her indifference towards himself. Neither the smile, nor the effort at conversation, nor the acceptance of his cousin's attentions could deceive *him*. He was piqued and annoyed, and angry with her, and disgusted with Lord Errington, but there was not a shade of sorrow in his anger. He was quite sure of Emily's affection; quite regardless of the pain he was inflicting; quite unconscious of any error on his own part. "A little jealousy to-day, and a few soft speeches to-

morrow, will set all things right again," was Mandeville's reflection, as he pursued his system of retaliation, in the full expectation of bringing Emily to a proper sense of things by so doing. In tormenting those they love best, what immeasurable pains people often take to torment themselves!

"Do you often come here?" inquired Emily of Lord Errington.

"Very seldom."

"And why not?" pursued she, by way of not appearing silent; for, at that moment, there was a pause in the almost ceaseless flow of conversation beside her.

"The truth is," said Lord Errington, colouring a little, "that whenever I come here, my tickets are begged from me at the gate by some unfortunate who particularly wishes to get in; and as I do not care the

least about it—" Lord Errington stopped short;—he had never uttered so many words consecutively to Miss Morton before.

"You are infinitely more generous than I should be," said Charles Grenville, gaily. "It is bad enough to come at all, particularly when one has sisters who keep one dancing attendance in the broiling sun for half an hour near the gate, as mine did to-day; but to come only for the pleasure of going home again, is really too bad. I always make charity begin at home in such cases."

"Indeed, you do not, Charles," said Emily. "You would do exactly as Lord Errington does, if anybody asked you."

"It is such a selfish arrangement, I think," observed Lord Errington, beguiled out of his usual taciturnity by Emily's im-

plied approval. "We can all come here whenever we please, whereas there are hundreds who have only one day in the week for their enjoyment, and that is precisely the day we choose to keep the gardens exclusively to ourselves."

"We shall have a new member in the House, who will astound us all with his eloquence soon, it seems," sneered Sir Geoffrey Charlton, who, finding that Miss Thornham's attention was exclusively devoted to Mandeville, had dropped behind with Charles Grenville. "What the deuce has Errington found to be talking about?"

"What the deuce is Mandeville talking about?" answered Charles, evading the question, and drawing a very natural conclusion from Mandeville's manner to Miss Thornham. "I believe, he has already beat

us all out of the field. We may as well give up the game as lost, with a good grace."

"Errington is positively speaking again," said Sir Geoffrey, in his turn evading Captain Grenville's remark. "Prodigious! He must have been acquiring some of Lady Courtney's courtly speeches, for the amusement of his lady love."

"Hush—look there," said Charles, for at that moment they encountered Lady Courtney, who paused a moment to exchange a few sentences with the whole party, including Lord Errington himself.

"I cannot stand this," drawled out Sir Geoffrey, making a precipitate retreat to where Blanche was standing for a moment disengaged. "I perceive, Miss Thornham," said he, "that you have not the misfortune

to be included on the list of that large lady's acquaintances."

"Not yet," said Blanche, whose quick penetration had already discovered a portion of Sir Geoffrey's character from which she secretly promised herself some amusement; "but I hope to be so at the earliest opportunity. Mr. Mandeville, you seem to be an especial favourite, particularly with the little lady in pink. Remember we claim your good offices in time for this beautiful *déjeûné* which you tell me is in agitation."

"Volontieri."

"Angels and ministers of grace defend us," exclaimed Sir Geoffrey; "by all that is horrible, there is Errington shaking hands with her."

"I fancied," said Blanche, looking very

innocent, "that a *poignet de main* was not reckoned so great a crime in this country as it is abroad."

Sir Geoffrey looked up in unfeigned pity at her simplicity.

"Oh, I see," said Blanche, with the same look as before. "The old custom is no longer in vogue amongst you. I am afraid I shall commit a hundred blunders before I learn right from wrong, Sir Geoffrey. I must remember never to shake hands with anybody, I suppose."

"Oh, pray do not take me *au pied de la lettre*," said Sir Geoffrey, entirely mystified by Blanche's manner. "It is quite proper, I assure you, in particular cases—but there are exceptions. One would not volunteer a *poignet de main* with this she-elephant, for instance."

"And yet I dare say she would do one a great deal less harm than many less sensible animals," said Blanche, laughing.

Happy Sir Geoffrey! He had engaged the attention of the heiress for five minutes, and was already dreaming of the hundred thousand sources of enjoyment that awaited him. Thrice happy man! whose panoply of conceit formed as impenetrable a shield to his self-love as though it had been manufactured from the hide of the rhinoceros. What a delectable possession is vanity!

"Your cousin is more than usually eloquent to-day," said Sir Geoffrey, addressing Mandeville, for he had a particular talent for making disagreeable or ill-timed remarks.

Mandeville appeared not to hear, so Blanche answered for him.

"I am sure I am not surprised at it," said she, "for Miss Morton is so very beautiful. If I were a man, I am certain I should be in love with her directly."

"Unless some one else happened to be present," whispered Sir Geoffrey, perceiving that Mandeville's head was at that moment turned the other way.

"That would make no difference in the world," answered Blanche, speaking aloud, and thus provokingly betraying the secret of Sir Geoffrey's whisper. "Everyone, as a matter of course, loves himself better than anything else in the world, only that very few will confess it. I am sure I do," continued she, laughing; "and I make no doubt you do the same, Sir Geoffrey, if one only knew the truth."

Blanche might as well have levelled her

darts against a stone wall; Sir Geoffrey's self-love was perfectly invulnerable.

"I find you are accused of a high misdemeanour, my lord," said Charles Grenville to Lord Errington.

"Indeed; and what may it be?"

"Charlton protests that we ought all to cut the large lady, as he calls her; and that we ought to cut you for having actually been seen to shake hands with her."

"Oh, is that all?" said Lord Errington, smiling. "Unfortuately, the large lady, as you call her, is a very old friend of mine."

"No extenuation in his eyes," pursued Charles. "It is part of Charlton's code that old friends from the country—Hottentots, as he calls them—should always be cut in London."

Lord Errington made no reply.

"Have you really known Lady Courtney long?" inquired Emily, a few moments afterwards.

"From my childhood."

He *could* have added, that to Lady Courtney's poor and low-born, but excellent and talented, father, had been entrusted the tuition of his infant years. He *might* have added that the old man had continued a pensioner at Trentham Abbey till the prosperous marriage of his daughter had rendered that asylum no longer requisite. But Lord Errington kept all this to himself. The little history would have been a welcome subject for sarcasm to those who scrupled not to fling stones with one hand, while they were receiving hospitality with the other.

"Sir Geoffrey Charlton, of course, is not among the number of Lady Courtney's visitors?" said Lord Errington to Emily.

"On the contrary, he took considerable pains to obtain from Lady Wrexham an invitation to her last *fête*, and has the promise of one for the next."

Again Lord Errington was silent for a few moments.

"You will think me a sad rustic, Miss Morton," he said at last, "if I ask whether it be customary in London to accept the hospitalities of a lady one day, and to disown her acquaintance the next."

"Not exactly that, but something very like it, I am afraid."

"And do you think the system one to be approved of?" inquired Lord Errington, again.

"No, indeed," replied Emily; "I can never understand the gratification derived from needlessly wounding the feelings of others."

It was at that moment that Mandeville had looked round, and in so doing had caught both Emily's words and the approving smile that played on the countenance of Lord Errington. It might have been fancy—it might have been conscience—but the words that had just reached him seemed so directly applicable to himself, that for a moment Mandeville was touched. Lord Errington had made no reply, and almost involuntarily he seized the moment to address a few words to Emily.

"Did I hear aright? Have you indeed been ill?" said he, in his own low, soft tone.

"I was overpowered by the heat of Lady Langley's rooms; I am quite recovered to-day," replied she, with wonderful composure.

"May I call to-morrow?"

"Oh, certainly; mamma will be very happy to see you."

"And you?"

"And I, and all of us—Carry and Georgy more especially."

The party had all this time been sauntering on, and had now reached the gate, which was fortunate, for it is doubtful whether Emily's self-command, admirably as she had hitherto sustained her part, would have held out much longer. Mandeville's politeness compelled him to go in search of Mrs. Thornham's carriage, for Sir Geoffrey Charlton manifested no intention of so doing. Captain Grenville was look-

ing for that of Lady Wrexham, after having seen his sisters safely despatched on their way homewards. The rest of the group were left standing together, Sir Geoffrey Charlton pursuing his imagined success with Blanche, Lady Wrexham conversing with her mother, while Lord Errington and Emily were thus left to amuse each other as they best chose. But both were silent. Emily's thoughts were far otherwise occupied at that moment; for how few, how very few, words will suffice to change the whole current of one's ideas. Unconsciously a smile was on her lip, while her eyes were fixed in utter abstraction on some beautiful white camellias which stood in the window of the little lodge near her. She was startled from her reverie by the voice of Lord Errington.

"You are fond of flowers," said he, observing the direction of her looks.

Emily coloured. How entirely had Lord Errington mistaken the present object of her thoughts!

"Very fond of them," said she, in a moment recovering herself, "and particularly of those beautiful white camellias."

"Andiamo, carina," said Lady Wrexham, and she and Emily moved on towards the gate, accompanied by Lord Errington and Charles Grenville. Mandeville was, however, awaiting them at the carriage-door, and he it was who handed them both into it.

What a complicated piece of machinery is the human heart! Emily had in a manner compelled herself to go into the gardens, with the resolution of encounter-

ing at once the task that awaited her. The whole morning had been one of self-imposed torture, and yet she was now returning home with the smile once more on her lip, and the brightness in her eye. Those few words, or rather the look and the tone that accompanied them, and that one pressure of the hand, had changed the whole current of her thoughts, and put all her valiant resolutions to rout. Mandeville was himself again, and she had done him wrong to suppose he ever could have been otherwise.

Lord Errington, too, how changed was he! As he sat alone that night in his own luxurious apartment in St. James's Square, surrounded by all the means and appliances for those pursuits in which he the most delighted, he for the first time found that his

attention would fix itself on none of them. His table was strewed with all the newest and most attractive publications. Some three or four pictures of rare merit, by artists as yet unknown, save to the equally unknown patrons of obscure and indigent talent, were leaning against the walls; but it was in vain that Lord Errington attempted to gather the contents of the one, or to contemplate the excellencies of the other. There was but one object in the room on which his eyes could fix themselves with anything like attention. It was an exquisite painting of his deceased mother, by Sir Thomas Lawrence, which hung over the mantel-piece, the only memento remaining of the young Countess of Trentham, whose early death had left in the heart of her husband a blank never to be filled up, and

in that of her son, child as he was at the period of her loss, an ineffaceable image of all that was best, and gentlest, and most beautiful in woman. As Lord Errington sat gazing with a melancholy affection on the portrait of his dead mother, a smile passed over his features.

"It is a perilous school from whence to choose a wife," thought he, "and yet it is that from whence *she* was chosen. Why then need I fear? If she equal her in goodness, as she does in beauty, I may well be content;" and Lord Errington withdrew his eyes from the portrait, and endeavoured to busy himself with a work which lay beside him. But it would not do. The image of Emily Morton filled his imagination and left no room for other thoughts, for the change in her manner towards him, and the

apparent pleasure with which she had that day received his attentions, had at last fixed the purpose on which he had long silently meditated.

CHAPTER II.

"WELL, caro," said Lady Wrexham, when the servant had retired, after placing the dessert on the table, "I think you will be obliged to come round to my way of thinking, and acknowledge that I am a very clever *diplomate* after all. I have little doubt that we shall soon be invited to Blanche Thornham's wedding; and with regard to Emily, if she have given away

her heart, it certainly is not to Mr. Mandeville," for Emily's manner, during the close of the morning, had entirely dispelled Lady Wrexham's momentary suspicion.

"I shall be only too happy to acknowledge myself mistaken," replied Sir William, sipping his Burgundy.

"A few more strawberries, if you please, caro—grazie—you are so magnanimous that I am half inclined for once to waive my privilege of being always in the right, and confess that I too have been mistaken. Do you know, I suspect I shall end by thinking Lord Errington not so awkward and disagreeable after all."

"Oho! a revolution in the state of Denmark."

"In mercy do not betray me to Lady Caroline. She would never let me hear

the end of it. But once or twice, when he was talking to Emily to day, I thought him positively handsome. What he might have been saying, I do not know, but I conclude it was something more than usually interesting, from the pleasure with which she appeared to listen to it."

"I am heartily glad of it," said Sir William, "for I suspect that my first impression of Lord Errington will turn out to be better grounded than yours."

"Oh, do not mistake me," said Lady Wrexham, looking up with one of her own playful smiles. "I will never concede that, at first sight, Lord Errington *could* be prepossessing; and it was only by dint of trying to find an excuse for poor Emily's bad taste, that I discovered the light and shade in his countenance at all."

"That is always the way with you ladies," replied Sir William, smiling; "you are never without an excuse for every new fancy."

"Fancy! Good gracious, you do not suppose that, except for Emily's sake, I could ever have a fancy for Lord Errington. I hope I have better taste than that. By the way, caro, did you not once tell me you had known Lord Trentham formerly?"

"Yes, but very slightly, for I was quite a boy then; and though he was not many years older than myself, yet his manners were too reserved to invite anything like intimacy. He had volunteered his services in the expedition to Spain, and, for a short time, we served there together."

"I was not aware that Lord Trentham had ever been in the army."

"He never was. He only served as a

volunteer during one campaign in the Peninsula; and that less, as it appeared to me, from any particular inclination for the thing, than as a means of active employment. He married very soon after our return to England, and lost his wife only a few years subsequently, since when I have lost sight of him; for he has resided almost entirely in seclusion at Trentham Abbey."

"And who was Lady Trentham."

"A daughter of the old Duke of Chester. She was very young, and very beautiful, and they were passionately attached to each other. I believe that Lord Trentham has never ceased to mourn her early death."

"Then Mr. Mandeville must be older than Lord Errington."

"Five or six years, I should think."

"How strange it is that Lady Emmeline

should never have come to England, to endeavour to interest her brother in her own or her son's behalf."

"It does seem strange, but there was some family difference about her marriage; and Lady Emmeline is an excessively proud woman, which is the only way in which I can account for it. Lord Trentham has never directly invited her to come over, and I fancy she does not choose to volunteer a visit."

"Well, but one would think that, with his fine fortune, and but one child of his own, Lord Trentham might have made his sister some suitable allowance. Poor Lady Emmeline is really very much to be pitied."

"Perhaps we none of us know the real state of the case, Caroline. Very probably Lord Trentham has offered to do so, and

she has refused it. People of such overweening pride often quarrel with their own best interests, and I think Lady Emmeline is just the woman to do so."

"Possibly," said Lady Wrexham, rising. "Will you come for an hour this evening to Mrs. Thornham's?" continued she. "She has some thought of renewing her evening receptions here, as at Naples; limiting, however, the number of her *invités* to a very few especial friends. We are not going to have anything like a party, I assure you. I have even begged for nothing but *sirop* and *eau sucrée*," she added, laughing; "that we may put all semblance of one to flight. Will you come? I shall be back at eleven."

"Willingly; let me know when the carriage is ready."

Mrs. Thornham's reception was, as Lady Wrexham had intimated, very simple and very limited that evening. It was, consequently, particularly agreeable. Perhaps it was the very simplicity of the arrangements which constituted their chief charm. There was no toilet, no lighting up, no extraordinary preparation, no attempt at display. It is a pity that in England these pleasant, sociable evenings are so rare. Here, if one asks people to tea, they begin to think what they shall put on. If they ask you in return, it is what additional cakes, candles, and company are required for the occasion, and so the thing becomes a trouble, and ceases to be a pleasure. The whole assembly at Mrs. Thornham's did not exceed a dozen persons, including the Grenvilles, and the rest of the garden

party, with the exception of Lord Errington—and Emily Morton, who had declined to join it on the plea of fatigue, which her looks fully justified. Mandeville, of course, was there; but the circle was too small, and his own regard for appearances too scrupulous, to admit of his devoting his attention to any one in particular. The fascination of his manner extended itself to all, but was exclusive to none.

"What an immense acquisition Mr. Mandeville is to our society," said Laura Grenville to her brother, as they were driving home.

"He certainly is an excessively gentlemanlike fellow," said Charles, "and very good-looking, too."

"Good-looking, indeed," retorted Laura, indignantly; "that is just like you,

Charles. Why, he is the handsomest man I ever saw."

"That is just like you girls," cried Charles, laughing. "The last good-looking face is always the handsomest man you ever saw."

"What creatures men are," retorted Laura. "If Apollo himself were to come among you, you would, I suppose, call him a very good-looking fellow. You will never allow that any other man can be more than good-looking. Such an unmeaning word."

"'Pon honour, I think there is a devilish deal of meaning in it," said Charles, laughing. "If a man is good-looking, what the deuce more need he desire? It is quite enough for anyone, I think."

"I daresay you do."

"Well, do not let us quarrel about it, and after such a pleasant evening as we

have had, too," interposed Emmy Grenville, a lovely little Hebe of sixteen, who was sitting in the other corner of the carriage, and who perfectly idolised her brother Charles. "I think Charles is right. For a man, to be good-looking is quite enough; very handsome men are generally so dreadfully conceited and disagreeable."

"Bravo, Emmy; and so they are. Excessive beauty is very apt to make a fool of a woman, but it often makes a knave of a man into the bargain."

Laura Grenville made no reply. She went on smoothing down her indignation with the reflection that though Mandeville was undeniably very handsome, yet her brother's last remark was in no respect applicable to him, till the carriage stopped at their own door.

"Come, Laura," said Charles, gaily, as they were all lighting their bed candles in the drawing-room, "let us kiss and be friends. Mandeville is a devilish *handsome* fellow. There, will that do?" and he put his arm round her.

"How can you be so silly, Charles? What do I care about it?"

But the kiss was given, and off went Charles, singing all the way as he ascended the stairs to his own room—

> "And he was a handsome dog's-meat man,
> A handsome, 'sinivating dog's-meat man,
> And all the ladies quickly ran—"

till the door closed, and the remainder of the ditty was lost.

"Madcap," exclaimed Laura, but she loved her brother too dearly to say more. Everyone loved Charles Grenville.

"How very agreeable Mr. Mandeville is," was Lady Wrexham's remark to Sir William as they drove home.

"So all ladies seem to think," replied Sir William. "Upon my word, Mandeville is a dangerous person to have introduced amongst them, Caroline. You will have as many wounds to answer for as the inventor of gunpowder. All that small shot of his is dreadfully destructive."

"The *battue* will, I suspect, soon be ended," said Lady Wrexham, laughing; "and that without his having made game of anybody, too."

"I begin to think so," said Sir William, as the carriage turned into Grosvenor Street.

Sir Geoffrey Charlton and Mandeville walked home together, and parted at the

door of the Clarendon, where the former had taken up his abode with all the pomp and circumstance which generally characterize the habits of those who have little left save their wits to live on. Mandeville, to do him justice, was thoroughly a gentleman, and therefore preferred a small lodging in Jermyn Street, because he could afford no better. His opinion on this point might by some have been considered rather singular, as may be gathered from the following memorandum which he once read to me from his pocket book:—"Query—What is the definition of the word *thief?* Does it apply only to those inferior classes who rob the great, or to the higher classes who rob the little? A vulgar rogue steals my watch, and I call him a thief; a genteel rogue (calling himself a gentleman) possesses him-

self of trinkets or luxuries to ten times the value, by means, not of light fingers, but of civil speeches and counterfeit good faith. Each retains possession of his bauble, but neither thinks it requisite to return value received. With his treasure the one perhaps satisfies the cravings of hunger—the other the cravings of vanity. Which is the thief, and which the gentleman?"

"They manage these thing differently abroad," said Mandeville; "not from any superior principle of honour—in that the English are not surpassed by any nation on the face of the earth;—witness the estimation in which our good faith in all mercantile transactions, the surest test of national credit, is held. In this country strangers are comparatively little overreached. Abroad, they fleece *us* without mercy, much on the

principle of the Arabians who think themselves privileged to live by the plunder of travellers; but foreigners never live on each other as we do. It is not that our principle of honour is less strong than theirs, but that our pretensions are more. If my Lord A——, with his 20,000*l.* a year, give champagne dinners thrice a week, Mr. B——, with his 500*l.*, imagines he must do the same. Even with half-a-dozen pleasant companions, a warm welcome, and a dinner better probably than the railer would have sat down to had he remained at home in solitary silence, plain sherry and port convert the whole affair into an abomination, and so, to avoid the alternative of giving a 'family dinner' or none at all, Mr. B—— and his friends regale themselves on turtle and champaigne, and leave their creditors to starve.

It is lamentable that the mere love of ostentation should thus be permitted to bring so heavy a stigma on our national character. No wonder that the French, who never exceed their incomes, be they what they may, should proudly point the finger of derision at our thousand runaway spendthrifts who yearly infest their land."

"Every Tuesday then, till further orders, I suppose," said Sir Geoffrey, as they reached the door of the hotel."

"For those who like it."

"Upon my honour, I like it amazingly. It is monstrously pleasant when one has nothing else to do. Good ni-i-ght."

"Conceited coxcomb!" was Mandeville's silent ejaculation, as he passed down Bond Street.

"Dang the fellow," thought Sir Geoffrey,

as he mounted the stair to his luxurious apartments, "with his set speeches and his macaroni manners. If he had not had such a confounded long start of me, I should have won the race easy. It is a deuced bore to have to run for it. Simpson" (to his gentleman's gentleman), "send me up some Seltzer water, and a bottle of hock—and here," as the attendant was closing the door, "and a plate of sandwiches of some sort;" and Sir Geoffrey threw himself, in an attitude intended to be picturesque, on the satin sofa, to await the arrival of the refreshment he had ordered.

"Well, we have had a very pleasant evening, I think," said Blanche, as she lighted her candle.

"Very, my love; I think we may as well continue them."

"Oh, pray do, mamma mia. Just in this pleasant *sans façon* way. These evenings are ten times more agreeable than a large party."

"I think so too, *mavourneen*" (Mrs. Thornham's pet epithet for her daughter); and the two passed on towards their sleeping-rooms, and continued chatting together while the process of undressing was going on. Mrs. Smith was very soon dismissed from further attendance, but Mandeville's name was never mentioned, save quite casually. Mrs. Thornham had her own thoughts; Blanche had hers, but though the most perfect confidence subsisted between them, neither found utterance that night.

CHAPTER III.

"WHAT have you got there, Célestine?" said Emily, as, after a refreshing and dreamless night, she half unclosed her eyes in the morning subsequent to her last meeting with Mandeville, and perceived Célestine standing beside her with something in her hand.

"Mais voyez donc, mademoiselle," replied the *femme de chambre*, who perceived that

her young lady was still very sleepy, and not at all disposed to have her curiosity excited in a degree suitable to the occasion. "Je n'en ai jàmais vu de si beaux. Ne sont-ils donc pas superbes?" and with one dexterous twirl the smart little French soubrette removed the white paper covering, and displayed a superb bouquet of white camellias.

"Where did these come from?" exclaimed Emily, without very well knowing what she said, as, suddenly starting up, broad awake, she took the bouquet in her hand to examine it, in order to conceal the heightened colour on her cheek from the prying eyes which were upon her.

"Je n'en sais rien, mademoiselle," answered the maid, with an expressive shrug, and a look which spoke volumes, but both

were lost on Emily, for her head was still bent over the flowers. "C'est sans doute quelqu'un qui connait bien le gout de mademoiselle pour les camélias."

"Put them on the table, Célestine," said Emily, in a tone of the most provoking indifference, and without a word of reference either to the beauty of the flowers, or the identity of the person who sent them. "I shall not get up yet, but I will ring when I want you;" and, as Emily lay quietly down again, Mademoiselle Célestine had nothing for it but to do as she was bid, and, descending into the servant's hall, to send her sharp wits on a voyage of discovery through the medium of John the footman, and William the page, and Mary the housemaid, and the many others through whose hands the said bouquet had passed to

her own, down to the kitchen-maid herself, who, happening to be talking to her sweetheart at the door at the moment of its arrival, had received it from—"Lac, how should she know whom — it war no business of hern—she hadn't even looked whether it war a man or woman as brought it," and so, with a few expressive shrugs on the part of Mademoiselle Célestine, there the inquiry necessarily ended.

Emily, meanwhile, had laid herself down, not to weep, but to think—think seriously, and, for the first time, painfully, on the subject of Lord Errington and his attentions. Those unfortunate camellias! What an unwelcome opening to a new day. She had never thought camellias ugly and disagreeable before, nor would she have done so now, had she permitted herself dispassion-

ately to examine the exquisite flowers which Lord Errington himself, in his own proper person, had, early that morning, selected with infinite care and trouble for her. But Emily saw them only through the medium of her own feelings—is it not thus we behold everything in life?—and these were not of the most pleasureable cast. It was evident that Lord Errington had misconstrued her manner on the preceding day. It was extremely likely that his hitherto unobtrusive attentions would, in consequence, assume a more decided character, and she felt quite certain that they would be received with marked approbation by her family. And on what plea could she possibly claim their forbearance? What sufficient reason had she to advance for rejecting the addresses of a man whose

brilliant position rendered him an object of attraction to the noblest lady mothers in the kingdom, while against his character the most fastidious could allege nothing? In opposition to all this, in justification of the disappointment of a mother's fondest wishes, she had only to plead—what?—virtually nothing beyond a mere selfish caprice; for to avow a preference—an unsought preference, perhaps—for one whose words had hitherto been so vague, whose conduct so contradictory, was, she felt, impossible, even to a mother—at least, to *her* mother. Mrs. Morton could not have comprehended the outpourings of a heart such as that of her ingenuous and high-minded daughter. She could not have comprehended the possibility of hesitation between the rich earl and his poor cousin. To *her* such feelings were as a

sealed book, and Emily felt, keenly felt, the influence of the deficiency, though it was unacknowledged to herself, and though she loved her mother with all the tenderness due to her affection.

All this was extremely painful, and extremely perplexing. But there was yet another source of uneasiness, wherein self-accusation, apprehension, and regret were still more painfully blended together. For the first time in her life, Emily felt that she had been tempted to play the coquette. And let no woman ever deceive herself by supposing that she may do so without deep and bitter retribution. She may, indeed, win a passing tribute to her vanity; but can she silence the reproaches of her own heart, or succeed in misleading others? And the deceit once discovered, lasting contempt

will invariably take the place of wounded affection; and the sting she has implanted in the heart that trusted but too fondly will return with tenfold bitterness to her own bosom. Emily felt that she had actually striven to be more than usually agreeable to Lord Errington, and that, too, on the very day when their supposed engagement had been blazoned forth in the fashionable journal, wherein, no doubt, he, as well as herself, had read it. And for what purpose had she done this? Not from any regard for him; not from any real pleasure she derived from his society, but merely to gratify her pique—her unjustifiable pique, as it had proved—towards another. How she despised herself as these self-accusing reflections passed through her mind! How Lord Errington would, she thought, have dis-

pised her, could he have guessed the real motives of her conduct. It was strange and new, the regret wherewith she dwelt on this last idea, and on the results which were likely to ensue from her imprudence. Oddly enough, though her heart was wholly Mandeville's, yet she had learned to regard Lord Errington's good opinion as something worth. She would willingly have retained him as a friend, though she could never receive him as a lover. She was gratified by his preference, and yet she looked forward only with dread to its avowal. Whichever way she turned, difficulty and discomfort seemed to beset her path.

"How can I escape from the dilemma into which I have so thoughtlessly precipitated myself," was her reflection, as she lay revolving, one after another, the various

sides of the question. "Lord Errington will inevitably follow up this unusual demonstration with something a thousand times worse still; and what answer can I possibly frame to all the questionings and importunities with which I shall be beset, should I venture to refuse him?"—and poor Emily closed her eyes, and began thinking over again all that she had thought before. "It is absolutely vain to lay down any particular rule of conduct," was the concluding reflection; "I must only be more guarded in future, and trust to some fortunate chance to extricate me. Perhaps Mr. Mandeville himself—surely, when he hears all these rumours, he cannot remain silent—he will be more explicit—unless—" and the colour rushed up vividly into Emily's cheek as the idea flashed through her mind

that all the demonstrations expressive, as she had supposed, of Mandeville's deep though unspoken attachment had been intended to convey only the language—the highly coloured language, it is true, but still only the language of courtesy, which was habitual to him; and if it were so (and Emily's cheek glowed painfully as she pursued this reflection), then had her love been bestowed unsought, unreturned, undesired, and Mandeville must, she thought, have penetrated the secret of her unsolicited affection, and have despised her weakness as it merited.

Emily sat up and looked at her Geneva watch, rang for her *femme de chambre*, and busied herself in the operation of dressing, to shut out the last and most painful reflection of all. Never had Célestine's

adroit powers of conversation been so welcome before. They forced her attention from the subject uppermost in her thoughts.

"Mademoiselle, what dress will she wear to-night?" inquired Célestine, as Emily, seated before her mirror, passively resigned herself to the arrangement of her tire-woman.

"Either the white tulle, or the pink crape, I suppose," said Emily, abstractedly.

"De pink dress would be très distingué wid coiffure of white camellia, n'est-ce pas, mademoiselle?"

No answer.

"Dere is noting pour coiffure so distingué as reel flower," persisted Célestine. "In de sommer à Paris, les dames les plus distinguées ne se coiffeut guère autrement."

"I suppose you will be wishing to go back to Paris one of these days, Célestine," said Emily, who, in her attempt at saying something, had gone very wide of the mark intended.

"Mais non, mademoiselle. Je suis très bien ici auprès de vous," answered the indefatigable Frenchwoman. "When mademoiselle is married, she will, sans doute, go to Paris, and den perhaps."

"As there is no chance of my being married at present, you will have a long time to wait, I am afraid, Célestine."

"Peut-être que non, mademoiselle," responded the *femme de chambre*, very much delighted that the interpolation of the words "at present" had opened up to her a glimpse of some impending event. "Qui sait? Vous voilà donc coiffée comme un

ange," she added, as her work was completed, and Emily rose from before the mirror.

"Well, my dear child," said Mrs. Morton, entering at the moment, to inquire for her daughter's health, on her way down to breakfast, "how are you to-day? But you need not tell me—quite recovered, I see, love, are you not?" and she kissed her cheek affectionately.

"Quite, mamma, thank you," said Emily, returning her mother's embrace. "I shall be down directly," and Mrs. Morton turned to leave the room; but, in so doing, she caught sight of Lord Errington's camellias, as they lay on the dressing-table. One or two questions and answers, and as many looks, exchanged between mother and daughter, were all that the presence of Célestine per-

mitted; but the *soubrette* was resolved not to let so favourable an opportunity for prosecuting her discoveries escape.

"I say to mademoiselle, that a coiffure de camèlias serait tout-ce qu'il y a de plus distingué pour le bal de ce soir. N'est ce pas, madame, wid de pink dress of mademoiselle?"

"You are very right, Célestine. It would be beautiful," said Mrs. Morton, contemplating the flowers with increased admiration. "We must endeavour to keep them quite fresh for night."

"But I do not think I shall wear my pink dress to-night, mamma," said Emily, not a little vexed at her *femme de chambre's* loquacity, for having entailed on her the necessity of exhibiting to all eyes, but especially to those of Lord Errington him-

self, the estimation in which his love-token would be supposed to be held.

"They would be equally beautiful with any dress," said Mrs. Morton, whose view of the case was so entirely different from that of her daughter as to exclude the remotest suspicion of Emily's motive for hesitation; "and, I assure you, Célestine is right. Natural flowers in the hair, at this time of the year, are esteemed in Paris the acme of good taste. You will be *coiffé à ravir* with them."

"They will be quite faded before the evening is half over, mamma," pleaded Emily once more.

"No such thing, dear. If you really are afraid of being made a fright, you shall have Isidore to put them in; but I must have you wear the camellias to-night, indeed.

Shall I leave them in the drawing-room as I pass by? They will be less likely to fade there."

"If you please, mamma;" and once more Emily was left to the forlorn hope of finding some lucky chance to extricate her from her new dilemma.

"Well, Emily," said Mrs. Morton, when, after breakfast, she found herself alone in the drawing-room with her daughter; "was I right, or was I wrong? What do you say now to my writing to Brussels for the wedding dress and veil?"

"That I would much rather you did not do so, mamma," answered her daughter, to whom the idea of a Brussels lace wedding gown in the present posture of affairs appeared thoroughly preposterous.

"And why not, my dear child? I think

you can have very little doubt now as to what are Lord Errington's intentions."

"And suppose I were to refuse Lord Errington," ventured Emily, without daring to look up, for she knew she was on tender ground.

"Refuse Lord Errington! I can suppose nothing half so preposterous. On what earthly grounds could you refuse him?" inquired Mrs. Morton, in a tone of alarm.

"Suppose, mamma, I did not like Lord Errington well enough to marry him?" ventured Emily again.

"The one idea appears to be quite as impossible as the other."

"Surely, mamma, you cannot think Lord Errington an attractive person—a person, I mean, that—that—anyone would be likely to—"

"I think him a very quiet, gentleman-like, nice young man," interrupted Mrs. Morton, not very well comprehending what her daughter could be at. "I really do not see what anybody could find fault with in him."

"Oh, no, mamma, certainly not—that is very true."

"And as to being in love with him, it is not at all necessary that people should be in love with the person they are going to marry. I cannot believe there is a woman on the face of the earth so silly as to refuse a man with Lord Errington's pretensions, merely because she was not in love with him."

Emily made no reply, for she felt that she could not acquiesce, and to combat her mother's opinion would have been still more painful to her.

"Just consider his position," pursued Mrs.

Morton, warming with the subject, "and the position in which you will be placed. There is not a girl in London that would not gladly change places with you, to become mistress of Trentham Abbey and all its belongings."

"Very likely, mamma; and yet I cannot help thinking that to marry a man for whom one has not the slightest preference must be a very strange and cheerless kind of thing, to say the least of it."

"My dear child," said Mrs. Morton, forcing a laugh, "I shall fancy you a shepherdess, with a crook in your hand, if you broach such antediluvian ideas. With forty thousand a year, no one need ever be cheerless. If you are *triste* at home, you have only to go out in search of amusement. If you are weary when out, you

have only to fill your house with company at home. And then, let me tell you that the delights which lie hidden in a countess's coronet are far more than an equivalent for all the love in a cottage that ever was dreamed of, but that certainly never was realised. It is all very well to talk about disinterested attachment, and marrying for love, and all that sort of thing, and very proper to make the world believe you are in earnest, but when you and I are sitting quietly here together, we may talk the truth to each other, as all mothers and daughters do, if one could only peep behind the curtain."

"Alas! not always," thought Emily; but the idea of opening her heart, and throwing herself on her mother's bosom and taking counsel there, never oc-

curred to her. She felt now painfully that the effort would have been fruitless. Alas, for the happiness or the well-being of a daughter who fears to pour every secret of her heart into that most safe and sympathising of all depositories!

"I will tell you what, Emily," continued Mrs. Morton, as a fitting conclusion to her peroration, "marrying for love is only fit for a poor curate with a hundred a year, who is content to have a house full of children, without bread to put into their mouths. So now give me my writing-case, dear; by the time the letter reaches Brussels, you will be overjoyed that I have sent it in such good time."

"Dear mamma," faltered Emily, without venturing to look up, lest her resolution should fail her, "forgive me, but if Lord

Errington were to propose to-morrow, indeed I could not marry him."

Mrs. Morton looked aghast.

"And why not?" inquired she, in a tone such as Emily had never heard before.

"I think, mamma, it would be unjust both to him and to myself, and I would not willingly deceive him," said Emily, gathering courage as she proceeded.

There was a painful pause of some minutes.

"I really thought you had more sense," said Mrs. Morton at last, in a tone of mingled alarm and reproof. "You know I at once consented to your refusing to marry Lord Thomas Grantham, but I suppose you do not mean to remain unmarried all your life, and you would hardly be mad enough

to refuse such a match as Lord Errington, merely because you were not violently in love with him. I own it would be a bitter disappointment to me if you did."

Mrs. Morton had touched a chord which brought the tears into Emily's eyes, and took from her the power of further remonstrance.

"You are tired and out of spirits to-day, dear," said she, as she drew the writing materials towards her, in the full conviction that her daughter's objections could be of no such formidable nature as to cause her any very serious uneasiness.

"If it must be, it must," thought Emily, resigning herself to her fate; "and after all I am not compelled to marry Lord Errington, because I have a Brussels lace gown;" and she took up the last annual, without

at all perceiving that its pages were upside down while the process of inditing, directing, and sealing the important dispatch was going on.

"I confess I do enjoy the idea of Lady Carleton's mortification when she finds all her manœuvres have failed," said Mrs. Morton, as she deposited the letter in her reticule, that they might themselves transfer it to the Post-office. "Her conduct really was shameful. And then to end by marrying Lady Harriet to that poor attaché."

"Marrying for love, mamma, "said Emily, endeavouring to smile.

"You will soon be overwhelmed with congratulations, I make no doubt," said Mrs. Morton, too much absorbed in her satisfaction at the prospect before her to observe

the remark. "A countess-elect becomes an acquaintance worth cultivating. There is only one person, I suspect, in London, who will be likely to quarrel with you on the occasion."

Emily looked up for an explanation.

"Cannot you guess?" pursued Mrs. Morton, as she rose, and stood before the glass to arrange a curl that had strayed out of place.

"No, indeed—I have no idea."

"What excuse do you mean to make to Mr. Mandeville?"

"To whom? For what, mamma?" faltered Emily, a vague hope of she scarce knew what springing up in her heart at this abrupt question.

"Do not look so frightened," said Mrs. Morton, laughing, as she turned round and

perceived Emily's consternation of countenance; for an idea of the truth never once crossed her mind. "What excuse do you mean to make for the signal disappointment you will occasion him?"—and as she spoke she turned to the mirror and completed the arrangement of the stray curl.

Had Mrs. Morton been gifted with a grain of penetration, or rather had not her discernment just then been obscured by the vision of blushing honours which awaited her, she must have perceived that her daughter's agitation was far greater than the occasion seemed to warrant. The colour had rushed vividly up into Emily's cheek, and without venturing to trust her voice in an inquiry for further explanation, she sat almost gasping for what was to come next.

"Why, do you not know that Mr. Mandeville is next heir to the title and estates, and would, I daresay, quite as soon that Lord Errington had not fallen in love with yours or any other person's *beaux yeux*. It would have been much more agreeable to him to have presented the reversion of an earldom in exchange for the fine fortune of la bella Bianca, as he calls Miss Thornham, than his own unadorned name, with nothing at all attached to it."

"Do you mean that Mr. Mandeville is engaged to Miss Thornham?" faltered Emily, in as steady a tone as she could command, as she drew towards her the china vase in which the camellias had been deposited, and occupied herself with their readjustment.

"Better not touch them, dear—they are

so delicate. If not actually engaged, very nearly the same thing, I fancy—at least, if I may judge by what everyone tells me. Charles Grenville quite enjoys keeping it a secret, for the fun, as he says, of plaguing Sir Henry Charlton, but it is not likely to remain a secret long, for Mr. Mandeville is there everyday, for half the day, I hear; and in public he scarcely speaks to anyone else. It will be a very advantageous marriage for him—such a nice, pretty girl, too, as she is."

"Miss Thornham *is* very pretty," said Emily, whose cheek was now quite pale again.

"By the bye, we had better order the carriage half an hour earlier to-day. I should wish to find them at home;" and Emily fully acquiesced in the proposed ar-

rangement, though she knew that that half hour was probably the very time at which Mandeville's promised visit would be paid. She did not expect, on being ushered into Mrs. Thornham's drawing-room, to find him there enacting the last scene of the last act of his morning's animated flirtation with Blanche; neither was Mandeville himself prepared for so unexpected a meeting. "He was at that moment on his way to Portland Place," he said, which was indeed quite true—"visit deferred—hopes to meet again in the evening." A few more equally unmeaning speeches, wound up, however, by the usual pressure of the hand, and Mandeville vanished.

Piqued again, Miss Morton *might* have contrived to remain at home till her usual hour at least. She had come out earlier

than was her custom, on purpose to avoid him, after his expressly saying he would call too; and by the time he had reached Jermyn Street, Mandeville had worked himself into a fit of ill-temper, very unusual with him, but which, on this particular occasion, extended itself to everything, animate and inanimate, within his reach.

Emily's arguments regarding the camellias were, notwithstanding all her efforts, overruled that night. They were placed, by the skilful hands of Mademoiselle Célestine, in her beautiful hair; and, despite the somewhat unusual paleness of her cheek, proved, as Mrs. Morton had predicted, eminently becoming.

CHAPTER IV.

"I BELIEVE I owe your lordship some thanks," was Emily's cold but courteous observation to Lord Errington, as they took their places together in a quadrille at Mrs. Vavasour's ball.

"You owe me none. The obligation is mine. Till now I was always in doubt as to which was the most beautiful flower of the creation;" and Lord Errington cast a look of

delighted recognition at his own camellias in Emily's hair.

It might have been fancy, but as he led her forward in the first *pas de deux*, she thought Lord Errington pressed her hand. How delightedly at that moment she would have listened to his lordship's announcement of a projected voyage to the North Pole, or a pilgrimage to Jerusalem, or anything, in fact, that could have released her from the dreaded crisis which she felt tolerably certain was impending. Fortunately, no great effort at conversation was requisite, for Lord Errington had taken up his position close to the orchestra, and the din immediately behind them consequently rendered any attempt at speaking in an audible tone fruitless.

"Shall I be admitted if I call to-

morrow?" whispered Lord Errington, when the quadrille was ended, as he led Emily to her seat near the door.

"We shall be very happy—"

She stopped short. Mandeville was leaning in the doorway, with his looks intently fixed on her as she reached it. Instead of his usual mode of greeting, he bowed coldly, without moving towards her. But Emily was becoming an adept in her task. She looked as though she perceived it not, bowed in return, and then turned to Lady Wrexham, who was sitting by Mrs. Morton.

"What lovely flowers—where did you get them, carina?" was Caroline's unlucky exclamation.

In an instant the colour rushed up into Emily's pale cheek, while a smile passed

over the features of Lord Errington, on whose arm she was still leaning.

"I am afraid they are not likely to remain lovely long, in the intense heat of this room," said Emily, evasively.

"A very dexterous mode of escaping from my inquiry," said Lady Wrexham, in a half whisper, and smiling in her turn.

"'Elles vous coiffeut a peindre,' as little De Cluny would say," she added, in a louder tone, observing Emily's embarrassment. "It is a pity to spoil anything so beautiful, so do let us make our escape into a cooler atmosphere. Mr. Mandeville, will you lend me your arm for three minutes. I will promise to release you in ample time to procure a *danseuse* for the next valse."

"I shall not dance to-night, unless *you* feel disposed to do so, and will accept me

faute de mieux," said Mandeville, as he led Lady Wrexham into an adjoining apartment, followed by Emily and Lord Errington.

"Thank you—no, I shall not dance, either," answered she, in her own lively way. "But pray do not visit on the heads of all these young ladies the crime of omission of which, I perceive, you think I have been guilty. I assure you I endeavoured to procure an invitation for—now, do not look so horrified, or I shall fancy myself the head of Medusa," she continued, perceiving the annoyed expression of Mandeville's countenance. "Not a soul can hear what I am saying, and if they could, what then? But I really did endeavour by every possible means to procure an invitation, and failed. The *signora di casa* here is as imperturbable as a rock."

"I assure you, you quite mistake my meaning," said he. "If all the world were here, I should not dance to-night."

"E perchè?"—and Lady Wrexham turned an inquiring glance on Mandeville, whose manner completely puzzled her. "Well, you are quite right, if you had rather not. It certainly would be something very like the self-immolation of the Hindoos, to dance in this fiery furnace," pursued she, perceiving at once that something was very much amiss, but without at all imagining what it could be; and Lady Wrexham went on talking for herself and everybody else, and for a time succeeded in her good-natured intention of withdrawing Mandeville's thoughts from himself.

But it was only for a time, for those

thoughts were too deeply and painfully intent on one object to fix themselves on any other. Mandeville followed up his intention, and, contrary to his usual custom, would not dance. All the soft looks and tender speeches launched at his unwonted indifference to the charms of Terpsichore were thrown away. He neither observed the one, nor remembered the other, for more than a minute after they were uttered. The only objects which were distinctly impressed on his perceptions at Mrs. Vavasours's ball, were Emily Morton, —her hair wreathed with those white camellias, which rivalled, but scarcely surpassed, the paleness of her cheek, and Lord Errington, as he lingered near her throughout the evening, with looks and manner not to be mistaken. Two or three

times Emily caught his eye fixed on her with an expression such as she had never before observed. It was, as she fancied, at once angry and reproachful; but whatever the cause of his displeasure, he seemed very little disposed to make it known, for he studiously avoided approaching her the whole evening. There he remained, wandering from room to room like a discontented spirit, surrounded by all that was gay and beautiful, yet making no effort to be either useful or agreeable to anyone.

"You are not valsing to-night—how is that?" said Charles Grenville to Mandeville, as he stood leaning at his old post in the doorway, looking passively on, while couple after couple whirled past them, animated by one of Strauss's most inspiring strains.

"I begin to think it is time to give up dancing. One gets so *ennuyé* with the same thing over and over again. After this season, I think I shall forswear balls altogether."

Emily and her partner had come to a dead stop close to the door just as the last words were uttered, which consequently distinctly reached her.

"Perhaps it has been my fault," thought she. "Can he be unhappy?"—and, womanlike, she forgot every feeling of self in that one idea.

"The next valse, Emmy," said Charles Grenville, leaning towards her.

"No, Charles, thank you, no more to-night, I am tired;" and as Emily turned her head to reply, her eyes encountered those of Mandeville fixed on her with that

same unaccountable expression. What he read in her momentary glance, and the quick blush that accompanied it, it would be difficult to say; but when Emily next paused in the dance on the opposite side of the room, she found herself suddenly addressed by a voice behind her, the accents of which were only too familiar.

"I heard you refuse to valse, Miss Morton. Does the same answer extend to a quadrille, or may I hope for one?" There certainly was no denial, no reluctance in the smile with which the inquiry was received. "The next?"

Poor Emily! how her heart leaped up into her throat, and how the rich colour mounted up into her pale cheeks, as she replied, "I am very sorry—for the next I am engaged."—"He will fancy it an ex-

cuse," thought she, "anything better than that;" and she added, "I am engaged to—Lord Errington."

How strange it is when men can find no better amusement than playing with hearts, as children do at battledore and shuttlecock! No matter how often it sinks—no matter how much neglected or uncared for—up goes the poor, foolish, fluttering thing again at the bidding of its master, till in some luckless hour he wearies of his toy, and lets it fall to the earth, to perish and be forgotton.

Emily had been watching and wondering whether Mandeville would let the whole evening pass without addressing her. No one could have divined what the effort at self-command had cost her, so effectually had she succeeded in concealing it. But

the struggle was over now; her star of hope was once more in the ascendant. She could even have valsed, if Mandeville had asked her, though she was too tired to valse with anyone else, and she would have talked with any other than Lord Errington through the impending quadrille, but she felt singularly indisposed to converse with *him*. And lo! as all these feelings rushed like lightning through her brain, and painted themselves on her countenance in a concentrated expression of gladness which was too evident to be mistaken, and as her head was still turned towards Mandeville in the full belief that he was about to renew his request, she saw him draw back with one of those stately bows, stand firmly for a few moments near her, as if to demonstrate that he had

no intention of pursuing the matter further, and then, making his way slowly, behind the circle of dancers, to the other side of the room, deliberately take his hat from beneath the resting-place where it had been deposited, and, without once turning his head, vanish through the door.

"Let her dance with his earldom, in heaven's name, if she likes it. Miss Emily Morton is not such a fool after all," was Mandeville's reflection, as he turned into Bruton Street, and he twitched up his collar, and smoothed the offending satin fold under his chin, from sheer lack of having anything else to quarrel with. No matter how much *he* flirted—what business had Emily Morton to do the same? No matter how sulky *he* was, *her* face was to be always dressed in smiles to meet him.

He had worn Blanche Thornham's rose in his button-hole. That was no reason why Miss Emily Morton should exhibit herself with Lord Errington's camellias in her hair. But all women are alike, and with this amiable objurgation on the whole sex, in which John Bull is generally supposed to find vent for any extraordinary ebullition of temper, Mandeville so far forgot himself as to awake the whole house by the furious ring with which he announced his desire for admittance at his own door at two o'clock in the morning.

CHAPTER V.

"How dreadfully pale Emily looked last night," observed Lady Wrexham to Sir William the next morning at breakfast.

"When does Mr. Mandeville talk of leaving town," inquired Sir William, without noticing his wife's observation.

"Not yet, I fancy. Why do you ask?"

There was a slight pause.

"Caroline," pursued Sir William at last, impressively, "that is an unprincipled man. I cordially wish you had not introduced him to the Mortons."

Lady Wrexham looked aghast.

"Do not mistake me, my dear little wife," said Sir William, kindly; "you did it without the least idea of harm. I should have done the very same thing myself, probably, had you not been here, for I confess that I have been totally mistaken in his character till now. Towards that sweet girl Emily, he has been acting the part of an unprincipled villain. He has been all this time assiduously labouring to win her affection, and he has no more idea of marrying her than I have."

Sir William spoke with unusual warmth. Lady Wrexham had never heard him

express himself so strongly before, but she had no argument to advance in answer to her husband's assertion. A thousand trifles recurred to her, which at the moment seemed to have no particular import, but which were now gradually confirming the light that was breaking in upon her. Yet still all was mystery. Mandeville's evident depression, yet his continued, and, as it seemed, prosperous flirtation with Blanche; Emily's changed appearance, and yet her almost declared acceptance of Lord Errington—how were these things to be reconciled?

"But Emily has, I think, all but accepted Lord Errington," said Lady Wrexham, not very well knowing what to say or think.

"Yes—with her whole heart and soul

devoted to another," answered Sir William. "And what has he done it for? Not with any intention of marrying her, that is very evident. Not because his own heart was engaged in the thing. If it had been, he would either have spoken out like an honorable man, long since, or have absented himself when he found it to be impossible. He has acted like a scoundrel, for the mere selfish gratification of his own vanity," and Sir William pushed his plate from him, with a gesture of irritation which was quite at variance with his usually placid temper.

"I really think you do him injustice there," answered Lady Wrexham, almost startled by her husband's energy of manner. "You know I have always thought he was fond of Blanche Thornham, and combated your idea of any attachment between him

and Emily; but, I acknowledge, I have changed my opinion, at least so far as *he* is concerned. Whatever may have been Mr. Mandeville's motives and intentions in the beginning, I really believe he has ended by making himself very unhappy."

"That cannot excuse his conduct in the least, Caroline. If he chose to run his own head against a wall, he had a right to do so; but he had no right to risk the happiness of that sweet girl. If he knew that it was out of his power to marry her, and perceived any symptoms of an attachment springing up between them, he should have avoided her society. He would have acted like an honorable man then. Why, at this moment, I am not at all sure that he is not playing the very same game with Blanche Thornham."

"I hope not, dear; Blanche is such a light-hearted thing."

"Those light-hearted things can feel deeply, nevertheless, and Mandeville's manners are very insinuating. Emily Morton was light-hearted once; though, certainly, she is so no longer."

"But, do you think that Emily would accept Lord Errington, if she were really attached to Mr. Mandeville?" said Lady Wrexham, very willing to disbelieve the evidence of her own senses, if she could.

"Probably, she has been talked over, and sees how much her mother's heart is set upon it; and, after all, so far as Mandeville is concerned, on what plea could she refuse him? If she had a different mother, she might open her heart to her, perhaps; but not to such a woman as Mrs. Morton. Excuse

me, my dear Caroline; she is your aunt, I know; but she has behaved very foolishly in this business."

"Indeed, I am afraid she has," said Lady Wrexham, unable to disavow the truth of her husband's assertion, and a little conscience-stricken at the share she herself had innocently had in the whole affair.

"And then what provokes me so excessively is, that the more I see of Lord Errington, the more persuaded I am he is just the person to make her, or any woman, happy. There is more in that young man than people think, depend on it. And yet she will either refuse him, and throw away such a chance of happiness as few girls could hope to meet with, or she will marry one man, while her affections are devoted to another; and all because Mr.

Mandeville has chosen to go on philandering for his own amusement, that he may have the gratification of seeing how much mischief he can do."

"Do you think there is anything *we* can do, caro?" said Lady Wrexham. "I am most willing to assist in any plan that can be devised."

"I am sure you are," replied Sir William; "but if Emily's own family are so blind and ill-judging, who can interfere? Besides, the mischief is, I fear, already done."

Lady Wrexham was silent. She would willingly have followed up any plan that could have been suggested, but she herself could devise none, while, at the same time, she felt painfully convinced of the truth of all Sir William had said.

"I will tell you what, Caroline," pursued

he, speaking more slowly than before, "a *female* flirt is bad enough. It is always a dangerous and despicable character, but a *coquet* is the most dangerous and contemptible object in the creation. Coquetry in your sex is inexcusable, and the surest proof of a vain and frivolous mind, but in ours it is far worse—it is ungenerous and unmanly. We at least have the power of defending ourselves, or of avoiding the danger, if we prefer it; but women are defenceless, and it is always the youngest, the most unsophisticated, the least protected, that are chosen for this cruel sport. Thank heaven, the character is rare, for it is a disgrace to manhood. If Mr. Mandeville have, as you suspect, burnt his own fingers, I can only say I am heartily glad of it. A man deserves to be shot, who can find no

better pastime than trifling away the affections of every confiding woman on whom he may choose to exercise his powers of attraction merely for the indulgence of his own vanity or his selfishness."

"Do not suppose, caro, that I wish to excuse such conduct as you describe—I condemn it as much as you can do; but, in the present case, I really do not think that either vanity or selfishness has had anything to do with it. I believe *now* that Mr. Mandeville's affections are really engaged, and, whatever may be the cause of it, that he is very unhappy."

"Then I hope it will teach him to be a little more considerate in future; but that does not in the least exonerate him from the charge of selfishness, in my mind. What business has any man to engage a

woman's affections if he know it can only end in nothing? It is sheer selfishness to do so. It is all stuff for him to talk about *love*. If he really loved her, her happiness would be dearer to him than his own. And then, forsooth, when the mischief is done, he tells you that he did not foresee what would happen, that he meant nothing, and pretends to be very sorry, and so forth, and shuffles out of the business the best manner he can, that he may play the same game with the next new face that happens to strike his fancy. It is all very easy for such men to talk about honour, and principle, and gentlemanly feeling. A really honorable man and a gentleman will be so in every action of life, but most especially in his dealings with women, because he feels it a breach of faith to abuse their confidence and help-

lessness. No man of honorable feeling, or of high spirit either, *could* degrade himself by assuming that most despicable of all characters—a male coquette."

Lady Wrexham made no reply, and after pausing for a minute or two, Sir William went on. "I shall keep a strict watch on his conduct towards Blanche, and you must assist me in that, my love," said he. "We may, perhaps, prevent mischief there. She has neither father nor brother to protect her, and therefore, on this occasion, I shall assume the rights of both, and should I see any symptoms of trifling, I shall most certainly exercise them."

"You will have no occasion, I am sure, caro," said Lady Wrexham, quickly, for she well knew her husband's determination in

whatever he thought right, and dreaded the idea of any collision with Mandeville. "*I* will do what I can to prevent harm, but if *you* were to interfere, Mr. Mandeville would, I daresay, resent it, and the whole thing would make such a dreadful *esclandre*."

"Tut, tut, my dear little wife," interrupted Sir William, there shall be no *esclandre*, I promise you. If Mr. Mandeville should have any questions to ask me, I shall know how to answer them, without giving you an hour's uneasiness; but there is no fear of that; Mrs. Thornham is a very sensible woman, and a word to the wise will be quite sufficient to settle the matter, depend on it."

Probably, could Sir William have followed Mandeville into his room on the preceding night, and have witnessed the deep

agitation in which, during several hours, he continued pacing up and down its narrow floor, his opinion would have coincided with that of Lady Wrexham, that whatever had been his offence with reference to Emily Morton, the punishment was, at least in some sort, commensurate with it. Not that Sir William's condemnation of his conduct would have been on that account diminished by one single grain. He was himself a very Bayard in principle: one in whose character was combined the deep feeling of the Christian with the chivalrous qualities of the soldier, and the more polished attributes of the gentleman of the old school. Sir William would never have plundered his friend and called it play; nor would he have taken the life of his friend and called it honour. He would as soon have robbed on

the highway as have defrauded a tradesman of his due — as soon have taken the life of a prostrate enemy, as have robbed a trusting heart of its happiness. It was said of Sir Philip Sydney that his life was "poetry in action." Of Sir William Wrexham might have been said (as it was of the patriot of France), that *his* life was "virtue in action." His code of honour might, perhaps, by some latitudinarians, have been considered antiquated and overstrained, but no one could have denied that, in abiding by its rules, he had won for himself a reputation such as any gentleman in Europe might have been proud to call his own.

But whatever, on the present occasion, might have been the opinion which Sir William Wrexham's nice sense of right had

led him to form, Mandeville's principles, both as a man of honour and a gentleman, were *theoretically* in no degree inferior to his own. He would have spurned the commission of a dishonorable or ungentlemanlike action; he would have recoiled with proud sensitiveness from the imputation of one, nor could any consideration have tempted him to take advantage of the tolerance sometimes conceded to transactions which, however permitted by the conventional rules of society, cannot but be wholly at variance with every true principle of right.

And yet there was one point on which Mandeville's principles and practice were entirely at variance; not systematically, for perhaps, had he permitted himself time for reflection, it would have been otherwise. There was in his habitual mode of address

towards women, a devotion of manner, and an earnestness to please, which, combined with extraordinary powers of fascination, could scarcely fail to carry captive the heart to which for the moment they would appear to be exclusively addressed. And thus, coquetry became at last to him both a science and a pastime, sullying all the noble qualities of his nature, rendering him regardless of aught save the amusement of the moment, and heedless of the innumerable miseries which were likely to ensue to the unfortunate victim of the hour, while at the same time his own fastidious heart remained untouched amid the many which were flung for acceptance at his feet.

But it was not destined to be always thus. The surpassing and graceful

beauty of Emily Morton had first attracted him; and he followed the vision as he had done half a dozen before, without at all dreaming of the far more enduring and attractive charms which lay concealed beneath so fair an exterior. The pursuit had commenced as a mere fancy, and been followed as an amusement. Gradually it acquired a still deeper interest, and at length Mandeville could no longer conceal from himself, that while striving, regardless of consequences, to win her affection, he had himself involuntarily learned to love with all the depth and ardour of a first and worthily bestowed attachment. Then it was that for the first time he began to taste the bitter cup of retribution, which his heedless, or perhaps, to speak more justly, his heartless conduct so fully

merited. He had never dreamed of addressing Emily as a suitor. So long as she continued an object of indifference—the mere instrument of his amusement—such an idea had never entered his thoughts. It was true he was no stranger to *her* attachment, for Mandeville was skilled in the reading of woman's heart, but it was not till he discovered how entirely his own happiness was bound up in hers that a thought for the future ever crossed his mind. It was only when the bitterness of the sacrifice came home to his own heart, that he remembered the impossibility of claiming that young and fair and trusting creature for his bride.

It was just at the moment when this recollection was for the first time pressing with painful certainty on his mind, that

Blanche Thornham arrived in London, and that Emily quitted it, for her brief sojourn at the Grange. What so natural—what so congenial—in that moment of unwonted depression, as to renew his flirtation with Miss Thornham? She knew it meant nothing—they understood each other perfectly. Fifty times he had said purposely in her presence that it was out of his power to marry. Her arrival, in short, was altogether a most opportune occurrence, and so Mandeville whiled every morning of Emily's absence in Mrs. Thornham's drawing-room, calling Blanche "la bella Bianca," forming plans for her amusement, and bringing her bouquets of roses, which roses he failed not to observe, with considerable satisfaction, were invariably treasured up till not a leaf remained to tell of their whereabouts.

And yet Mandeville was all this time really and seriously unhappy, and cared no more for Blanche Thornham than if she had been the Queen of Timbuctoo. But the habit was strong upon him, and the lesson he had learned was as yet too recent to induce him to forego the gratification of having a pair of bright eyes ever ready to sparkle with joy at his approach. *He* was wretched, and Emily was away. Why should he not indemnify himself for her absence as he best might?

With Mrs. Morton's unexpected return to town came also the evident demonstration of what were Lord Errington's intentions with respect to her daughter. Then came the meeting in the gardens, and then the ball, with those hated white camellias, the exhibition of which could be construed into

nothing else—at least so thought Mandeville—than a token of acceptance on her part. This, perhaps, was the most bitter drop in the whole cup. He could have endured—at least, he fancied so—to see her married to anyone but Lord Errington, but it was gall and wormwood to think that his lordly cousin had snatched from himself a prize which, had he possessed but a little of the rent-roll of Trentham Abbey, would not, he felt, have been denied him. His cousin became henceforth an object of dislike. From the moment he perceived the change in Emily's manner, she became an object of anger. So long as she had been devoted to *him*, all was well. He would have been content to go on philandering for ever; but though it was true he had never given himself a right to interfere in

her actions, though he had never asked her to marry him *and never could*, yet it was with a feeling very like indignation that Mandeville perceived her listening calmly to the addresses of another; nor was that indignation in any wise diminished by the discovery of the painful effort which the assumption of indifference towards himself, and of complacency towards his cousin, cost her. It was enough that she had *wished* to appear indifferent—enough that she had manifested her appreciation of Lord Errington's superior pretensions, and so Mandeville revenged himself for her offence by assiduously devoting himself to Miss Thornham, fully sure of thus eventually securing his own triumph, and Emily's submissive return to her allegiance

But if, in the first moments of disappoint-

ment and wounded vanity, Mandeville was induced to give vent to his irritation in feelings and actions like these, a little calm reflection sufficed to convince him that it would be unjustifiable to persist in the indulgence of them. On his return from Mrs. Vavasour's ball, he dismissed his servant, and, secluding himself in his solitary apartment, continued long impatiently pacing up and down. But gradually his feelings calmed, and his step moderated. He became, not less wretched, but more just than before, and then Emily's pale cheek throughout the preceding evening, the smile of unequivocal delight with which she had replied to his address, and the glance of no less unequivocal disappointment by which it had been succeeded—all rose on his memory with a feeling very nearly akin to remorse.

"What right have I to place myself between her and prospects so brilliant?" was his reflection; "what have *I* to offer in exchange for them?"—and as the remembrance of his own position contrasted itself painfully with that of his more fortunate cousin, Mandeville's step became once more as rapid as before.

"She can never be anything to me—never!" pursued he. "A moment's reflection would have told me what a madman I have been," and he continued his measured walk, endeavouring the while to form resolutions for his future line of conduct, every one of which was the next moment found to be impossible of fulfilment.

"I will see her once more, and then quit England for ever," was the determination which finally closed his reflections.

And Mandeville called the following morning in Portland Place, at his accustomed hour, in pursuance of this resolution, and prepared with sundry cards of farewell, in case he should be denied admittance. But no—Mrs. Morton was at home that day—it might be that Emily had expected him—and as he ascended the stair, Mandeville passed his hand through the rich chestnut curls which clustered round his fine forehead, and prepared to enter the drawing-room in his usual friendly and unembarrassed manner. At the moment of his doing so, Emily's head was bent down in examination of a drawing which lay on the table before her, while leaning over her, in the act of pointing out some of the master-touches of the artist, was Lord—Errington. Mrs. Morton was

seated quietly near the window at her embroidery frame. Carry and Georgy were on a stool at her feet, amusing themselves with a picture-book, for they had not yet ventured to make acquaintance with the master of the beautiful prancing horse; so that, to all appearance, Lord Errington and Emily were left by general consent to amuse each other after their own fashion. Nothing could have been more unpropitious to the stability of Mandeville's wise and amiable resolutions than the whole aspect of affairs. Lord Errington advanced to meet him in his usual frank and friendly manner, which just then seemed peculiarly offensive. Little Carry and Georgy sprang towards him with expressions of joy and demands on his attention which had never appeared so out of place, and finally, as

if to complete his irritation, Emily's manner, as she held out her hand in greeting, though evidently the result of effort, was still as composed and dignified as possible. One glance at the table where the residue of Lord Errington's white camellias still kept their station, and Mandeville's resolve was taken. Not a word of his quitting England was mentioned. He chatted gaily with the whole party, examined and praised the beautiful drawing which Lord Errington had brought for Emily's approval, delighted Carry by looking into her picture-book, and at last took his leave and went directly on his way to Albemarle Street, there to pass the next hour, apparently in high spirits, in the lively society of Blanche Thornham.

So much for the amiable feeling or the stability of purpose of a male coquette!

CHAPTER VI.

THE concluding weeks of the London season were to Emily Morton a period of intense and ceaseless suffering. She was now the betrothed of Lord Errington, and thus it was not only the struggle with her unfortunate attachment which oppressed her. She was weighed down still more by the consciousness of deception, which, to a really virtuous and ingenuous mind,

must ever be acutely painful. Mandeville remained in town, and though he now abstained from more than an occasional visit to Portland Place, yet they met on all occasions in public with a forced politeness which was infinitely more trying and difficult than a total estrangement would have been. The truth was that Mandeville's vanity was now enlisted against his better feeling. Had Emily at once unhesitatingly refused Lord Errington, all for his love, he would have been content, but it was unendurable that she should thus quietly consent to give him up without a word of apology or regret, without a sigh or a tear, or a single indication of sorrow beyond the pale cheek, which he knew to be involuntary. He had had many pretty playthings of the same sort before, but not one that

had ever ventured to quarrel with his caprices. When he ceased to smile, they had begun to cry, and then there had usually been a scene with a great many tears, and a good deal of petting, and soft words, and tender farewells, enough to produce a very admirable tragic effect, and there the matter had ended. But there was nothing of the kind here. Emily's manner was graceful and easy, but it was dignified too. There was something in it that told Mandeville he was lowered in her estimation, and something, too, that made him feel lowered in his own. But he had not good feeling enough to give up the game quietly as lost, and to leave the field open to his more fortunate rival. He chose rather to prolong his triumph over Emily's affection, though he could no

longer hope to wring from her a confession of it, and thus, irritated by her coldness, and resolved to revenge himself if possible, he sought every opportunity of prosecuting in her presence an animated flirtation with Blanche Thornham.

Nothing, at the same time, could exceed the delicacy, the generosity, the disinterestedness of Lord Errington's conduct. Misled by a concatenation of circumstances, many of them the result of Mrs. Morton's adroit management, and all, it may well be believed, beyond the control of her daughter, he waited only till he fancied himself secure of Emily's affection to make known his wishes, but from that moment all reserve was cast aside. His countenance was no longer inexpressive, his manner no longer either cold or silent.

It was impossible that she should not have been touched by his devotion, and grateful for the profuse generosity in which he delighted to display it. Even Mrs. Morton's utmost wishes were exceeded by the manner in which Lord Errington took upon himself to decide the important matter of settlements, a point which Lord Trentham had left to the joint decision of his son and the family lawyer.

"Your lordship is not aware, perhaps," said Mr. Simpson, when the matter was under discussion between them, "that the jointure you name has never been conceded except in cases where the lady brought an accession of fortune to the Trentham estates, which does not appear to be the case here."

"No matter, Simpson; let it be as I

have said," answered Lord Errington. "A widow's jointure should always bear some proportion to the state in which she has been accustomed to live. It is a cruel thing to see a woman compelled to forego the comforts which have become habitual to her, at the very moment when she needs them most, merely to swell the bulk of a property like this."

Nor was it only in his intercourse with the Morton family that a change was observable in Lord Errington's demeanour. Released at length, by his announced engagement to Miss Morton, from the frivolous and vexatious assiduities which had converted his sojourn in the metropolis into a state little short of martyrdom, and well nigh driven him to seek refuge from his persecutors in the seclusion of Trentham

Abbey, Lord Errington no longer feared to adventure himself among those who ceased to be objects of dread when they ceased to consider him an object of pursuit. His manner became easy and unembarrassed, whereas it had hitherto been awkward and constrained, and even those indefatigable manœuverers, who had been accustomed to attribute either to pride or to apathy the frustration of their matrimonial designs on the coronet and appendages, were fain to acknowledge that, when once awakened, the intractable lion of the day could be as pleasing, as agreeable, as animated, both in countenance and in conversation, as any one.

Lord Errington himself was either too unlearned in the intricacies and littlenesses of the great world of fashion, or had be-

come too indifferent to them, to trace all the varied emotions of his new-found contentment very accurately to their source. He had read much and thought deeply, but his experience of men and manners had been deduced rather from that vast laboratory of the world in general, than from that particular fraction of it to which, till very lately, circumstances had rendered him a stranger. The thousand springs and motives by which it was governed would have been utterly incomprehensible to a mind like his, from whence neither the force of habit nor the habitual deference to conventional rules had banished the broad principles of right on which all his opinions were founded, had not the wearisome attentions of which he had been made the victim induced him to scan the conduct of those

around him with a far greater degree of curiosity and discernment than they themselves ever dreamed of his possessing. His announced engagement to Miss Morton completed the work of discovery. It was a signal for the cessation of hostilities—of operations offensive on the one side, and defensive on the other. People all smiled on the future Earl of Trentham, for Trentham Abbey and the mansion in St. James's Square, more especially when they should be graced by the presence of their new mistress, held forth prospective promises of enjoyment far too attractive to be neglected; but beyond this they gave themselves no further trouble about him. Lord Errington, on the other hand, in the full measure of his contentment, found in his recent discoveries in the arcana of fashionable life only

an increased source of happiness and self-gratulation. If he had learned to despise the many, he had learned to appreciate the few. Never had the charm of Emily Morton's character, her graceful yet modest manner, her surpassing beauty, yet total absence of affectation, appeared to him so attractive as when thus placed in contrast with the hollow, heartless, artificial beings by whom she was surrounded.

"I am almost afraid to tell you how closely I have watched your conduct," said he, one day, smiling, "for several months past—nay, even from the first hour of our acquaintance. I had always looked with dread upon the idea of choosing a wife from the hotbed of London dissipation; and, I believe, I should never have had courage to risk the venture, had I not heard you

spoken of as something so widely different from all the other butterflies one meets there."

"Indeed! By whom could you have heard me spoken of at that time?" inquired Emily, in some surprise; for she knew that Lord Errington's circle of intimates was very small, and had only lately included any of her own immediate clique.

"By Sir John Courtney. I do not wonder you should look surprised. You would scarcely suppose, from his quiet, undemonstrative manner, that he is not only one of the most observant persons in the world, but I know no one who equals him either in depth of understanding or clearness of judgment. He spoke of you accidentally, one day, as an exception to certain general rules on which we were both per-

fectly agreed,—it was the day of Lady Courtney's *déjeûné*, and it so happened that you passed us immediately after, leaning on somebody's arm—Mandeville's, I think. I remember thinking him a very happy fellow."

Emily dropped the smelling-bottle which she held, at that moment, in her hand. It was broken in the fall.

"It is useless to you now, and so *I* may keep it," said he, taking possession of the fractured bottle. When Emily went to dress for dinner, an hour later, a red morocco case, containing the most exquisite *flacon* that Howell and James's exquisite repertorium could produce, was lying on her dressing-table.

There was scarcely a day on which some unfortunate meeting with Mandeville, or

some unlucky allusion to him, did not in like manner occur, keeping up the irritation of nerve which was gradually becoming almost unendurable.

"And so, Emmy, you're booked at last," said Charles Grenville, the day after Mrs. Morton's announcement of her daughter's marriage. "Mind you ask me to the wedding, that I may wish you joy, and get a kiss into the bargain."

"Very well, Charles"—and Emily bent her head over the embroidery-frame at which she was seated; but Charles Grenville perceived that she had done so only to conceal the tears that had gathered in her eyes.

"God bless you, dear Emmy, and make you happy," said he, affectionately, mistaking the cause of her emotion; but she made no answer, and he never alluded to the sub-

ject again. Who can tell the martyrdom of the next few weeks? What pen describe the anguish of mind in which Emily Morton found herself compelled to struggle on —her cheek decked in smiles, her tongue tutored to words of gladness, her ear tortured into attention to those congratulations, common-places, and frivolities which appear so infinitely irritating and impertinent to a mind wholly and painfully preoccupied as hers? In consenting to listen to the addresses of Lord Errington, and in striving to do so in that spirit which her innate sense of right pointed out as the only just one either towards him or herself, she had stifled every selfish feeling and yielded to the wishes of her mother; and even in the bitterest moments of trial, a sweet consciousness of having

done so brought, as it ever must, its own exceeding great reward. Still, be it remembered that this was her first lesson in the school of sorrow, and in the wide range of earthly trial there is scarcely one more bitter than that which springs from the conviction that our first, and best, and holiest affections have been worthlessly bestowed. It was in vain that reason raised her voice, or pride upreared its crest. Emily had indeed succeeded in tutoring her outward demeanour into the semblance of indifference, but the struggle with her own heart would yield to the never-failing influence of time alone. She had loved Mandeville with all the fervour of a young, warm, trusting heart. She had insensibly habituated herself to regard him as the type of all that was best and

noblest in human nature. His own hand had torn the veil aside. He himself had taught her the first bitter lesson of man's deceit and woman's credulity—of blighted hopes and betrayed affection; still the conviction of his unworthiness was fraught with far too much of misery and regret to be admitted without a struggle more severe than any which Emily had ever yet been called on to encounter.

On the other hand, her position with regard to Lord Errington was scarcely less painful or perplexing. His very devotion, his generous disinterestedness, his unbounded confidence, became only so many additional sources of shame and self-reproach. In the intimate intercourse which now subsisted between them (for his chief delight appeared to be in eliciting her sentiments

on every subject, and in laying bare his whole heart before her in return), she had learned to estimate his noble character as it deserved, and painful indeed was the comparison which forced itself on her recollection between his highmindedness, his noble candour, his generous, self-denying affection, and that of one whom she had loved—"not wisely, but too well." She had learned, too, how rigid were his opinions on many subjects, how pure his sentiments on all; and the knowledge, while it enhanced her sense of his superiority, brought with it, at the same time, a feeling of dread and self-accusation, and yet an increased desire for his good opinion, which was painfully at variance with the consciousness of deception that made her feel ever a guilty thing when in his presence.

"Perhaps I have mixed too little in foreign society to form a correct opinion on the subject," said he, one day, in answer to a question of Emily's; "but common sense, I think, points out that those *mariages de convenance* can be little better than a lottery, in which there must necessarily be more blanks than prizes. The system is pursued under the impression that when people are young they scarcely know what will make them happy, and so far, in some cases, it is well enough; but when marriage is made, as it generally is abroad, a mere matter of contract, without reference either to the inclination or the assimilating qualities of either party, it must be a mere chance whether happiness or misery be the result."

"But if foreigners are correct in think-

ing that, when people are young, they are incapable of judging for themselves?" said Emily, in a tone of self-command, which was gradually becoming habitual to her.

"A notion which is allowed to have too much weight in foreign countries, as no doubt it has often too little in our own. It is frequently, not that people are incapable of judging, but that they do not sufficiently consider what they are about. But there is another cause which, in my opinion, operates even more strongly against happiness in married life, and I do not think that it is at all sufficiently remembered. People sometimes conceal their true characters, opinions, and principles, when they have a point to gain, forgetting that, in the intimate intercourse of married life, the mask

must be torn aside. There should be no deception before marriage, and there would be less disappointment after it. No assumption of feelings or sentiments not our own, on any subject, or on any pretence whatever. Everything should be clear and open as the day, for it is a cruel mistake to run the risk of all the heartburnings, and subterfuges, and recriminations which are almost the inevitable results of this pernicious habit. Confidence *must* cease for ever when the deceit is discovered, and without confidence there can be no lasting happiness in matrimony."

Poor Emily! How each word as it was uttered smote upon her heart! What would she not have given at that moment for resolution to cast herself at once on Lord Errington's generosity—to confess all

—to render herself worthy of his good opinion—to ensure his esteem even while removing all claim upon his love? But her heart failed her at the thought. What had she to confess? Not simply that she had been tempted to play the hypocrite in return for his disinterested devotion, but likewise that those affections which he fondly and proudly fancied were all his own, had been already bestowed—*on one who sought them not.* She could have acknowledged the first—nay, she could even have asked his forgiveness and forbearance—but the last appeared impossible.

"You will fancy I have been reading you a homily, dearest," said he, passing his arm round her, as he observed the heightened colour in her cheek, and the downcast direction of her looks. "I must find something

pleasanter to talk about. I believe I sometimes weary you, but you must forgive me, Emily. It is because I would have you acquainted with every feeling of my heart, for you can hardly conceive how earnestly I desire to save you from the pain of disappointment hereafter. I would rather you should know me now as I am, with all my faults and failings, whatever they may be," continued he, with a smile, "than that you should find them out only when too late to be rid of me, if you wished it."

Emily returned the pressure of Lord Errington's hand, and thanked him with a smile, for she fully appreciated the justness and kindness of his sentiments, though she believed herself wholly unequal to the task of acting up to them. What an infinitude of trouble, of mortification, and of self-re-

proach might be avoided if people had always the courage to act ingenuously.

"You will soon have an opportunity of judging for yourself of foreign society, I hope," continued Lord Errington, for, in compliance with Emily's wishes, a continental tour had been decided on. "Paris in September is very enjoyable, and we shall then just have time to cross the Simplon before the snows come."

"I really believe I have been very *exigeante* in asking this," said Emily, who had now recovered her self-possession. "If the truth were known, I do believe you had rather spend the winter at Trentham."

"No, indeed. I am very glad to have so good an excuse for revisiting Italy. I expect some little difficulty with my father, indeed," said he, smiling, "for he will not

be very willing to part with you, I am afraid. But I mean to be very inexorable."

"Despite all I have heard you say of the dangers of foreign society?"

"I am not afraid, dearest. I will make only one condition. You shall do what you please, and go where you please—only let me be near you. A young married Englishwoman on the continent is in a dangerous position; but while her husband is near her, she is always safe both from intrusion and remark. I am always sorry when I see a countrywoman abroad rendering herself an object of censure, and all perhaps only from the absence of a little more discretion."

"And do *you* think continental society so infinitely more delightful than our own?" inquired Emily. "Caroline perfectly raves about it."

"It is on an easier footing—more sparkling—less laboured, certainly; but I think we owe the continent no thanks. It has brought too many discontented hearts to England, and ruined the domestic peace of too many English firesides for that, and we not gained any adequate equivalent in return. A prolonged residence in the great cities of the continent, in nine cases out of ten, is to me like the reading of a beautiful, but immoral, book. We forget its mischievous tendency in the fascination of the language, but its demoralizing influence remains notwithstanding; had you passed through the ordeal of a few seasons in Paris, Emily, I doubt whether I should ever have had the courage to seek you for my wife."

"Oh, surely that is too severe. Some of

the most amiable people I know have been entirely educated abroad. Caroline, for instance, was brought up in Paris from childhood."

"I am not so uncharitable as to think there are no exceptions," said Lord Errington; "particularly where a girl has a virtuous and prudent mother to watch over her; otherwise, there are very few young minds that, after a protracted residence abroad, can escape unharmed from the contamination of foreign principles and foreign manners; and once sullied, the female mind, like a sheet of white paper, can never regain its original purity."

"But I fancied," said Emily, "that unmarried women abroad were permitted infinitely less license than in this country. I have heard that many things which are per-

fectly proper here, are reckoned absolutely the reverse there."

"Among foreigners, yes; and foreign girls adhere to the letter of their law, which compels them to remain automatons till they marry, but English girls are not subject to the same restrictions, and are therefore sometimes tempted to fly into the opposite extreme, and to adopt the manners of French married women, which never sit gracefully on an Englishwoman, and are particularly the reverse in a very young person. She insensibly acquires a self-possession of manner which is only consistent if she wishes to be thought a professed woman of the world; but in my opinion (and I believe there are few men of a different way of thinking) in so doing she loses her greatest charm.

"I must still plead in favour at least of many exceptions," said Emily. "Surely it does not necessarily follow that every Englishwoman abroad must adopt the manners and become the person you describe."

"By no means; but it is very difficult for her to avoid it. An Englishwoman there (of course I allude more especially to those who mix largely in the dissipations of a city, such as Paris, for instance) is surrounded by foreigners who flatter her vanity with their honeyed phrases and *petits soins*, and not unfrequently end by making her a finished coquette. Unless she have a very well regulated mind, and a very strong head indeed, she learns to love nothing but frivolous amusements, and to think lightly on the most serious subjects.

We all so very soon become habituated to look with indifference on that which is daily before our eyes! For instance, in their observance, or rather non-observance, of Sunday, how many English people are there who are startled and shocked in the beginning, but who end by falling into the custom of the country, and think no harm of it!"

Ere Emily had time to reply, she was interrupted by the stopping of a carriage and a thundering knock at the door, and the next moment Lady Wrexham was announced.

"Buon giorno, carina. Come sta?" said she, with the little bit of Italian with which her language was always tesselated. (What would Johnson say could he listen to the hodge-podge into which our pure

Saxon is degenerating?). "How do you do, Lord Errington? You promised to call on me, but you have never been to see me yet."

"Your ladyship will forgive me, I hope. I have had so few mornings unoccupied of late."

"I conclude so," interrupted she, with a good-humoured and significant smile. "Well, you are forgiven on the promise of better behaviour in future;" and Lady Wrexham gracefully threw herself into the *bergère* which Lord Errington had wheeled forward for her accommodation.

"I have not above two minutes and a half to stay, for I am in a great hurry," continued she, at the same time placing one tiny foot, with its satin slipper, so as to be just visible on the cushion at her feet, "but

I wished particularly to hear how you were, carina. They told me you were better."

"I am better, thank you, dear. Where are you going, that you are in such a hurry?"

"To a private exhibition of the works of the most celebrated artists in London. Will you come?"

"Thank you. It is too late, I fear, or I should enjoy it very much. I suppose you are going to Buckner's?"

"Good gracious, no! Buckner is a very clever man in his way, and can make ladies and gentlemen look exceedingly well —*on canvas;* but he only works for posterity. My artist is a much more useful and important personage; I am going to Vouillart."

Lord Errington and Emily both smiled.

"I shall not ask *you* to be my cavalier on the occasion, my lord," continued she, with a saucy smile, "for as an Englishman, such an indulgence would be quite thrown away upon you."

"It would, indeed," said Emily, laughing. "I wish you had been only half a minute sooner, to have heard the discussion in which we were engaged."

"De grâce, dites moi, donc;" and Lady Wrexham drew her chair forward, and placed herself in an attitude of attention.

"Lord Errington was only abusing the continent with all his might."

"All Bluebeards do the same, carina. I would have you beware of him."

Lord Errington smiled good-humouredly, but said nothing.

"The poor continent," sighed Lady Wrexham; "I wonder what it has done, that John Bull takes such delight in abusing it?"

"It has set us all gadding," said Lord Errington, with a smile.

"And why not? Can anything on earth be duller than John Bull in his own chimney corner?"

"I do not know that. John Bull, if we would only allow it, is a very pleasant fellow in his way, though not quite so light-hearted, perhaps, as in the good old times of our grandfathers and grandmothers."

"Poor old souls, with their minuets and their buckram."

"And their cheerful chimney corner," said Lord Errington, smiling. "People had no continent to go to in those days,

and so they made themselves happy at home."

"Heaven save the mark! Can you find me any just cause or impediment why this generation should not be still happier than the last, if it likes to be so?"

"None whatever. But is it so?"

"Is it? Most undoubtedly. Everyone goes abroad now, gadding, as you call it; and no one will, I think, deny that one is much happier there than here. The very climate makes one feel happy; and then the society, the way of doing things, is so much easier. Here, there is such a *gêne*, such a fuss about everything."

"I allow it all. The continent is very fascinating; but poor England is not so unendurable, if we would only do her justice. And even if she were, do you think it

very wise to make ourselves discontented with the country in which we must pass our lives?"

"And why must we pass our live in it, if we are happier elsewhere?"

"I acknowledge myself a thorough John Bull on this point," said Lord Errington, smiling. "I think everyone has a right to *visit* the continent, but no one has a right to *live* there, unless he have some better reason than simply his own pleasure for so doing."

"What! would you have people mope away their lives here, when they might be enjoying themselves there? Surely every one has a right to be happy in his own way."

"Not at the expense of happiness to others, and in direct violation of our duties towards them."

"And how in the world can my being abroad affect anybody but myself?"

"By taking you out of your own sphere of usefulness here, to one probably of mere pleasure there. Do you not think, for instance, your poor people round Rock Castle are happier and better tended when you are present to watch over and minister to their wants? Nay, I will even venture to assert that Lady Wrexham herself is far happier when acting the part of their ministering angel, than in the very gayest scenes of selfish gratification, of which life on the continent is generally made up."

A tear gathered in Lady Wrexham's eye, while a smile of assent played over her features.

"You would lay an embargo on us all," "then," said she, after a moment's pause, re-

suming her playfulness of manner, "like Nicholas of Russia, with Siberia or the knout in *terrorem* over our heads—a transit from the 'sweet south' to Kamschatka in case of disobedience."

"No, no, I would not be quite so hard upon you," said Lord Errington, with a smile; "that is, if you had any good reason for being refractory—if not—"

"I will find you fifty in a minute. First, to begin, my own sovereign will and pleasure."

"Inadmissible."

"Arbitrary creature! Well, then—health."

"Admitted."

"Then, a little innocent recreation after all my toils and troubles at home."

"Admitted also."

"Education."

Lord Errington paused.

"Not if it means a few showy accomplishments, at the expense of every solid and useful requirement."

"In other words, you would have us stay at home to learn Greek, Latin, and Hebrew, endure Minerva's helmet and shield, and study her process of petrifaction."

Lord Errington smiled.

"I would have Englishwomen," said he, "educated for the happy home of English wives and mothers, for which, in nine cases out of ten—for, remember, I admit there are exceptions—a foreign education totally unfits them."

"And you will not even admit that tra-

velling improves the mind and enlarges the understanding?"

"Pardon me, I spoke of the abuse, not the use of travelling. Those who really travel for information will doubtless glean a rich and delightful harvest; but nine-tenths of those who profess to do so, return with little besides a distaste for home, and a confused catalogue of names and places, dated according to the amount of amusement they have found in each. I have seen it the case even at Rome, where, to many, a ball-room seemed the only object of interest worth studying."

I used to think Lord Allington bad enough," said Lady Wrexham to Emily, "but I could always bring him to something like reason. The case is hopeless here. Now, confess the truth," continued

she, turning to Lord Errington again, "do you not think us poor continental creatures perfect reprobates?"

"Not absolutely," replied he, with a smile.

"Well, but to speak more seriously."

"To speak more seriously, then, I think the continent has done us a great deal of harm. It has improved neither our morals nor our manners."

"Manners! then it must be our own fault. What can be so elegant as the manners of a well-bred Frenchman?—or what more correct? One never sees a thing that the most fastidious eye could find fault with."

"To my taste they generally want repose, which is essential to elegance. *Pour le reste*, I grant that abroad the eye

is never shocked by any impropriety, because with them 'l'hommage que le vice rend à la vertu,' is a science so perfectly understood; but with us it is different. An Englishwoman has less tact—to use a juster phrase, perhaps, is less artificial. When she acquires freedom of thought, she frequently acquires levity of manner with it."

"I do not see why she need acquire either," said Lady Wrexham. "I have lived a great deal abroad, and I am persuaded that no one there need either see, hear, or think anything that is in the least objectionable, unless she choose to do so."

"No doubt; but when people are living in an atmosphere of vice, it is difficult to escape unharmed from the contagion."

"Living in an atmosphere of vice, is a strong expression," said Lady Wrexham.

"In sober truth, scarcely too much so. Look at the Parisian theatres, where it is notorious that pieces are nightly exhibited on the stage, which with us would not be tolerated. Look at their amusements, their masked balls, their carnivals. Look again at their literature, the surest test, perhaps, of the morals of a people, and I think you will acknowledge that I have scarcely used too strong an expression, in calling theirs an atmosphere of vice."

"You are very severe. Why, you would have us believe there is infection in the very air of Paris. Now I maintain that an Englishwoman—yes, and a Frenchwoman too—may avoid everything objectionable if she choose to do so."

"God forbid I should say otherwise; but where the cup of pleasure is at the lip, it is

difficult not to taste it; and you know," continued he, smiling, "the innocent in these cases must always make up their minds to be confounded with the guilty."

"I do not at all see why."

"No Englishwoman, for instance, would confess that she had been to one of their *bals masqués*," continued Lord Errington, smiling again. "She knows too well our opinion of them, and yet I suspect that many gratify their curiosity who will not acknowledge it. How can we distinguish between the innocent and the guilty?"

"I would never go to a place, if I were ashamed to confess it," said Lady Wrexham, colouring a little. But I really must be running away, Vouillart will think me lost," pursued she, rising to go. "Remember, I have not confessed myself beaten;

Emily, you must bear me witness. Addio, a rivederla, carina mia, I am quite enchanted to see you looking so well to-day." and she kissed Emily *à la Française* on both cheeks; "a truce till we meet again," and holding out her hand to Lord Errington, Lady Wrexham vanished.

"That is the kindest and best creature in the world," said Emily, extenuatingly, as the door closed.

"I am sure of it. There is a *naïveté* about her that is quite charming."

"And her love for the continent is not at all surprising, for she met so much both of kindness and enjoyment there."

"Oh, I am not the least surprised at it in anybody. It is very fascinating, very delightful, and there is, no doubt, a great deal of sterling worth and kindness to be

met with; still, it is none the less exceedingly dangerous."

"And do you not fear to take me among all these fascinating dangers?" said Emily, smiling. "Suppose, like the rest, I should learn to like them too well?"

"I am not afraid, dearest. Your own good sense and good feeling will be your safeguard. Only, as I before said, let me be near you—make me your friend at all times, and I shall fear nothing. Do you promise?"—and Lord Errington drew her tenderly towards him, and bent his head forward to catch the expected answer; but some sudden and painful recollection froze the words as they rose to her lips, and Emily could only reply by returning the pressure of Lord Errington's hand as it held hers.

"You think me too *exigeant*," said he, kindly.

"No, indeed, I think you all that is kind and good," and she spoke with a sincerity not to be mistaken.

"I believe I am *exigeant*," pursued he, drawing her still more closely towards him; "but you must forgive me, dearest. I am like a miser with some newly found treasure. I would have your very thoughts all my own, if I could."

It was a relief to Emily's beating, self-reproving heart, that the timepiece at that moment reminded Lord Errington of the lapse of time, which he appeared entirely to have forgotten.

"Impossible! It cannot be six o'clock," said he, looking at his watch. "It is, indeed, and I have still a journey to perform

before dinner;" and without noticing Emily's look of inquiry, he hurried away.

When Lord Errington returned to Portland Place in the evening, a magnificent set of emeralds and diamonds, from Storr and Mortimer's, explained the cause of his abrupt departure.

CHAPTER VII.

THE London season was now over; but the votaries of pleasure still lingered. Except, that the *trousseau* was still incomplete, and the lawyers had not yet ended their labours, there would have been no inducement, however, to detain the Morton family longer in town, for, in compliance with Emily's earnest entreaty, Mrs. Morton had at last conceded that the wedding, instead of being

solemnized with extraordinary pomp at St. George's, Hanover Square, should take place at Bentley, where a large family party was already invited to do due honour to the occasion. Gladly would Emily herself have made her escape to the calm and quiet of the country, from the first moment of her engagement to Lord Errington; but she had no sufficient plea whereon to ground her opposition to her mother's wishes on the subject, and Mrs. Morton was far too vain and frivolous a woman lightly to absent herself from the scene of triumph at the very moment when so vast an accession of dignity had fallen on her. To her unhappy daughter the period of probation was consequently converted into one of almost unmitigated torture. It was true that she resolutely

and scrupulously persevered in her self-allotted task; for though she never had been taught the only lesson which, under such trying circumstances, could really have been useful to her, yet her own innate sense of right pointed out that, from the moment she had consented to become the wife of Lord Errington, every energy should be consecrated to rendering herself worthy of his confidence and devotion. But the effort required was, under existing circumstances, intensely painful to a mind untutored to self-command, as hers was. The culture of the heart (of all others the most useful and necessary to a being born to struggle against the thousand trials and disappointments from which none can hope to be exempt) had formed no part of Emily Morton's elaborate educa-

tion; neither had she ever been taught to kneel at that altar where alone she might have found strength and guidance in the hour of need. No mother's care had taught her infant heart to raise itself in prayer. The devotions of her childhood had been a mere mechanical operation, performed morning and evening in the presence of the hired nurse or the French governess. But all Emily's feelings were in the right place, if she had been early taught the proper mode of exercising them. Under different training, her character would have assumed an elevation and a stability of thought and action which can never exist but when based on the solid foundation of religion. The gold was there, but it had been left neglected in the mine. It needed the

fiery ordeal of trial and disappointment ere even she herself could be made aware of the treasure which lay dormant in her bosom. Had Emily been permitted to pursue the course which her own inclination and her sense of right equally pointed out, and to retire at once to the undisturbed calm of the country, the struggle to which she was subjected would thus have been incalculably lessened. There she would have been freed from the continued torture of Mandeville's presence, and with judgment unbiassed and thoughts undistracted, would probably have very soon learned to regard his conduct in its true light. But in London there was no possibility of escaping from the perpetual struggle—the ceaseless effort at composure—the tumult of contending feelings,

attended, as they were, by an irritation of nerve which was gradually becoming almost unendurable. In London, moreover, there was not one human being to whom she could unburden the secret that was weighing at her heart—not one either to share the load, or to teach her how to lighten it, whereas at Bentley she might have indulged in the society of her sweet sister Gertrude, who, with Aunt Dorothy, was, according to the existing arrangement, to reach the Priory only a few days prior to the wedding. To *her* Emily could have spoken with unreserved confidence, certain of finding sympathy, and in firm reliance on the counsel to be expected from her finely-regulated and correctly-judging mind, for Gertrude had had no fine-lady mother to mar by her

neglect the treasures of heart and understanding with which nature had so liberally endowed her. Conceded in infancy to the care of Aunt Dorothy, she had thus been rescued from the dangers to which Emily had been exposed, and had grown up no less a model of classical beauty than of feminine virtue. Though usually separated during the months of the annual migration to London, the most undivided confidence and affection had always subsisted between the sisters. But never till now had Emily felt so sensibly the superiority of Gertrude in those points wherein she knew herself to be the most deficient — never before had her heart yearned so painfully for her sister's presence.

Meanwhile, comments and conjectures

as to the change in Miss Morton's appearance were not slow in disseminating themselves. Emily made a point of appearing everywhere, and of taxing her spirits to the uttermost, partly in compliance with her mothers's wishes, partly from an aching desire for perpetual excitement, and partly to conceal more effectually that which was passing within; and so far as the mass of thoughtless, uninterested observers were concerned she perfectly succeeded. With the exception of the Wrexhams, and of Mandeville himself, not a human being in the wide world of London suspected the real truth. But though she had learned to suppress every expression of feeling, it was not equally possible to conceal the changed appearance, which was gradually becoming too remarkable to escape notice. What-

ever its cause, the effort was evidently beyond her powers of endurance. Every one agreed that Miss Morton had never looked so beautiful, never appeared so animated as now; but there was something almost startling in the transparent brilliancy of her complexion, and the feverish lustre of her eye, as contrasted with the form and features, which were gradually losing their beautifully-rounded proportions.

"Caroline," said Charles Grenville, one day, "do you think Emily is happy at this great match which my aunt has made for her? What can make her look so unnaturally brilliant and beautiful? I sometimes fancy those high spirits are forced, do you know."

"Indeed, I do not know, Charles," answered Lady Wrexham, with a sigh. "I

only know it makes me very sad to see her. She reminds me so often of poor Laura, now. *Her* illness, if you remember, began with just that same beautiful, brilliant colour."

"By heavens, if I thought she was unhappy at this match, I would tell Errington to-morrow," exclaimed Charles, vehemently. "He is a fine, noble fellow, and would only thank me for telling him the truth, I know."

"But it may not be the truth, and you may do mischief, Charles; therefore let me beg of you not to think of such a thing," said Lady Wrexham, quickly, and in fear of some thoughtless indiscretion on the part of her harebrained cousin.

"What time has Mrs. Morton fixed for leaving town?" inquired Sir William Wrexham, the next day, after dinner. It

was the first time he had alluded to the Portland Place family for more than a fortnight.

"They go next week, I believe."

"It is time they should;" and without further comment Sir William filled his glass again, and changed the subject.

But though Mrs. Morton had been quite as foolish, as imprudent, and as ill-judging as Sir William had supposed, he had done her injustice in imagining that she had been either blind or insensible to the change in Emily's appearance. Though a mistaken, she was an affectionate mother; and the loss of one daughter by that insidious disease which generally arrays its victims in increased beauty, and always invests them with increased interest, as though it sought, by rendering them more lovely and

beloved, to enhance the bitterness of bereavement, had taught her to mark anxiously the transparent brilliancy on Emily's cheek, and the unnatural sparkle of her eye. It was only as to the cause of all this that Mrs. Morton was deceived. Of any sickness of the heart, more especially to a daughter on the verge of possessing a countess's coronet, and forty thousand a-year, with jointure, pin-money, and diamonds to correspond, she never dreamed. Late hours, hot rooms, and all the attendants on London dissipation were the only causes which suggested themselves to her imagination, and, accordingly, every crowded assembly was, from that time forth, scrupulously avoided; the carriage was invariably ordered at twelve instead of four in the morning; a certain number of hours

were allotted everyday to riding in the park, and all the routine of asses' milk, Iceland moss, and messes without end, as suggested by good Dr. Dereham, was strictly adhered to. The result was so far satisfactory that Emily's cheek, for a time, certainly became paler, and her eye less bright, and her mother's anxious heart gathered comfort from the conviction that a removal to country air, the contemplated wedding tour, and, finally, a winter sojourn in a milder southern climate would complete the work of renovation.

But Lord Errington's uneasiness had taken quite a different turn from that of Mrs. Morton. He perceived with infinite sorrow and alarm the change in Emily's appearance; but either from the superior fineness of his natural perceptions, or that

the depth of his own attachment had rendered him clear-sighted, something for which he could not very well account whispered that the cause was not purely physical. A suspicion of the real truth never crossed his mind. The possibility of conduct such as Mandeville's, still less the idea of any voluntary deception on the part of Emily herself, never for one moment occurred to him. Once, indeed, a thought of Lord Thomas Grantham—to whom Emily had been reported to have been engaged—suggested itself, but the idea seemed almost too absurd for admission.

"If I could but be satisfied that her heart is at ease—that my suspicions are unfounded," was Lord Errington's reflection, as he rode musingly one day towards Portland Place to accompany Emily in her

daily ride; "or, if they are only too just, if I could discover, at any self-sacrifice, the way to make her well and happy. A sick heart must be such bitter, bitter suffering;" and Lord Errington involuntarily sighed as the possibility of being compelled to relinquish his own dearest hopes, for her still dearer sake, suggested itself.

The air was peculiarly reviving as they rode slowly on through the Regent's Park, enjoying undisturbed its refreshing breezes and verdure, for at that early hour it was nearly deserted.

"When are we all to leave town?" inquired Lord Errington, as he rode close to Emily's side, with his hand on the neck of her beautiful Arabian. "I shall be so happy to see you at last in the refreshing breezes of the country."

"Oh, not half so happy as I shall be," exclaimed Emily, earnestly; "I would willingly have left town long ago." And the moment she had spoken, the rich colour rushed up into her cheek. "I believe mamma talks of next week. How people abuse our unfortunate climate," she continued, abruptly changing the subject, "and yet can anything be more balmy or delicious than this? Surely Italy can boast no sky more blue, or trees more green, or breeze more reviving."

"We are apt to see even the beauties of nature through the medium of our feelings," said Lord Errington, delighted to hear Emily speak in a more than usually animated tone. "To me, at this moment," pursued he, with a smile, "Italy itself could not appear more beautiful,

and certainly not more enjoyable, than this."

"But you always see everything *en rose*," said Emily, colouring slightly.

"Not always—no—I always endeavour to do so, but I never found the effort so easy as now."

"But you have not answered my question," said Emily, with something of her own playfulness of manner. "Is the Italian sky bluer—the trees greener—the air softer and sweeter than this?"

"Scarcely so."

"Ah, I see," said she, smiling, "you will not in anything admit the superiority of the 'Sweet South' over our own England."

"Not in point of climate, certainly; in most parts of Italy, the climate is quite as variable as our own."

"You know Lord Allington, do you not?" said Emily.

"I do indeed," replied Lord Errington, smiling at the remembrance of the old earl's ludicrously ultra-Anglicism. "I wonder he has not long since laid an embargo on all those foreign importations of his lady wife."

"I wonder so, indeed; only fancy her appearing at a party, the other night, in a Greek cap, which had been sent her (by way of a joke, of course) from the Archipelago by Lord Thomas Grantham."

Lord Errington suddenly turned his head round. Emily perceived the movement, and involuntarily the rose deepened in her cheek.

"Lady Allington ought to thank *you* for that, I believe," said he, gazing earnestly in her face as he spoke.

"He—thank *me*," exclaimed she, encountering his gaze with one of her own beautiful bright smiles. "No, indeed; I am quite innocent of having led the poor old lady into such an extravagance."

"No—no—it is impossible," thought Lord Errington; "I *must* be mistaken. That sweet face is truth itself."—"But not quite innocent of having driven the owner of the Antelope to the Archipelago," added he aloud, with a smile.

"I believe he wanted an excuse for going," said Emily, smiling also, "and found it, no matter where. If it has answered the purpose, which I sincerely hope and believe it has, I shall have no reason to regret any share I may have had in the matter."

Lord Errington returned home very happy that day. Once more his uneasiness

was set at rest, and Lord Thomas Grantham was forgotten. The truth was that the cool fresh air had had an unusual effect on Emily's appearance and spirits—that morning she had actually enjoyed her ride.

CHAPTER VIII.

ENJOYED it?—Yes!—and with a deeper, fuller, purer sense of happiness than any which she had ever before experienced. In Mandeville's conduct, more particularly from the time that his powers of fascination had achieved their conquest, there had been an indefinable contradiction and mystery—must it be added?—a deliberate system of torture, which, by awakening a continued

and harassing doubt of his sincerity, had poisoned even the happiest moments passed in his society. But who could associate the idea of mistrust with the frank and noble nature of Lord Errington? And as each day some new and beautiful feature of his character developed itself, Emily could no longer resist the conviction of his superiority, nor remain insensible to a love so devoted and so utterly unselfish. In deference to her mother's wishes, she had struggled against the weakness of her own heart—and the sacrifice had brought its own reward. But the effect, in so painful a position as hers, together with the irritation of nerve consequent upon it, had proved too great for the physical powers of a frame always somewhat fragile. A growing sensation of bodily weakness had now succeeded

to the mental excitement of the last many weeks, while, at the same time, it rarely happened that some unlucky *contretemps* did not occur to disturb the tranquillity which a few hours' cessation form worry and irritation had induced, and not unfrequently it was Mrs. Morton herself who was unconsciously the occasion of it.

"What *could* keep Mr. Mandeville away? His visits used to be so pleasant. His whole day could not be devoted to Blanche —they must ask him to dinner, and the Thornhams to meet him." The party accordingly was invited; and chance having discovered that Mandeville was disengaged, he was compelled to promise compliance. It was true that an excuse was put into Mrs. Morton's hand just as she had finished dressing, but not in time to spare Emily the antici-

pation which had cost her a whole day's suffering. The consequence of this, and a hundred similar occurrences, was, that though the morning's ride might bring back the colour to her cheek, and the animation to her manner, the effect was never permanent; and Lord Errington perceived, with infinite pain and uneasiness, that it was not so.

"May I read your thoughts?" said he, with a smile, as one morning they sat together, waiting the arrival of his phaeton, in which he was to drive Emily out that day. "You have been a long time studying the grouping of those flowers on the carpet."

Emily started, and the eloquent blood rushed in a moment to her cheeks.

"No—no—I cannot trust them out of my

own keeping," said she, after a moment's pause, forcing a smile, but without venturing to look up.

"If I had a place in them, I am content," persisted Lord Errington.

Emily coloured more deeply than before, for she felt that his eyes were fixed upon her countenance.

"You had, then, most certainly," replied she, with some effort.

Lord Errington took her hand. "You think me very unreasonable sometimes, I believe," said he kindly.

"No, indeed. Why should you suppose so?"—and this time she looked up inquiringly.

"Emily,—" he paused, uncertain how to proceed—"you would not willingly deceive me, I know, but I have sometimes fancied

there was something weighing on your spirits which you wished, yet feared, to confide to me—something more than—"

"Lord Errington!" exclaimed Emily, suddenly looking up, while every vestige of colour forsook her cheek.

"I did not mean to startle you," said he, kindly, and almost alarmed at the change in her manner and appearance. "But why do you call me Lord Errington? Unless you call me Edward, I shall not know how to answer."

"Edward," faltered Emily, in a scarcely audible tone, and the crimson blood rushed up again, over neck, cheek, and brow. The name was associated in her mind with other recollections, and at that moment with none more painful than the ever-recurring consciousness of the deception to-

wards himself, in which by a train of almost unavoidable circumstances she had been led to participate.

"I would not willingly give you a moments pain," said Lord Errington, speaking more quickly than was his custom. "If I am doing so, forgive me—pray forgive me. But this idea has haunted me for the last fortnight, and at last I resolved to tell you so. Only say that I am mistaken." He paused for the expected answer, but none came.

"I have no right to intrude myself into your confidence, you would say," said he at last, somewhat coldly.

"No — no — indeed I had no such thought," exclaimed Emily, aware of the construction he must put on her silence and embarrassment.

An expression of pain passed over Lord Errington's features, while a thousand vague suspicions floated through his mind.

"Then what inference am I to draw from your silence?"

Emily had been schooling herself to the disclosure which now seemed inevitable. She had ardently desired to free herself from the consciousness of concealment by which she had been oppressed. She had thought and rethought over the words in which the communication could best be made. Yet now that the moment so dreaded, yet so desired, was come, all seemed forgotten. Her very powers of utterance appeared to have forsaken her.

"There is one question," pursued Lord Errington, mildly but firmly, finding that

she was still silent, "that I *have* a right to ask, and to which I have a right to expect a candid answer." He paused a moment in some agitation, and then, in a low, calm tone, proceeded:—"Our engagement —am I to understand that it is the result of your own free and unbiassed will, or has it been influenced by others?" He paused a moment for an answer, but she was silent. "In other words, would you wish to dissolve it, if you had the power—perhaps I ought rather to say the resolution—to do so? For both our sakes, I entreat—nay, I expect—a candid answer."

"Dissolve it! oh no!—I would not—indeed I would not," exclaimed Emily, tremblingly, but without a moment's hesitation, and she spoke truly.

For a moment Lord Errington made no

reply. There was truth in her words, but her manner puzzled him.

"I must be content with that answer, since you will grant me none other," said he, somewhat coldly. "One word more, and let the subject be dismissed. I wish to wring from you no confidence which you may choose to withhold, but let me entreat you to remember, before it be too late, that this cannot last for ever. A *wife*—if she value either her own peace, or her husband's regard—must have no concealment from *him*."

Lord Errington paused, for the effort to speak calmly was somewhat painful, but the next moment he resumed.

"I did not intend to distress you," he continued, taking Emily's hand kindly, for he perceived that her eyes were filled with

knowledge that there *has* been a weight upon my spirits, which I have withheld from you. I was wrong, perhaps, to do so—but—"

"Am I in any way, directly or indirectly, connected with it," inquired Lord Errington, while again a thousand vague suspicions rose before him.

"Yes;—I promise that you shall know all," continued she, quickly, perceiving that Lord Errington was about to speak; "but not now. I have been wrong and foolish, but the very remembrance is full of pain. Dare I, then, still ask your forbearance?"

"But one word more, and I have done," replied he; "but let me entreat you to pause before you answer. Take time for reflection, if you will; but when you do answer me, let it be candidly." Lord Er-

how inadequate her return for its pure and unselfish affection; how humiliating was the comparison which forced itself upon her, between his generous conduct and that of one on whom she had lavished so much unrequited love, so many vain regrets! Emily raised her tearful eyes to Lord Errington's countenance, and encountered his looks bent anxiously upon her. She was able to articulate only a few, scarcely audible, words; and the next moment her blushing face was hidden on his shoulders. But those few words had been sufficient to seal the fate of both.

"Mine—my own for ever, then," was Lord Errington's passionate exclamation, as he clasped her to his breast; and the smile of genuine happiness which played on Emily's features, as she again raised her

head from his shoulder, spoke more plainly than words could have done.

"You can hardly conceive what a load this has taken from my heart, dearest," said he. "I have been fancying a thousand things which, probably, had no foundation."

"It is all past and gone now," said she, passing her hand across her forehead, as if to dispel some frightful dream; "but it has cost me more suffering than I care to recall. You shall know all, I promise, but not yet. When I have learned to think you less terrible," she continued, with a faint smile. "Will you, can you trust me?"

"Yes—implicitly. But we must not lose our drive, dearest," continued Lord Errington, suddenly changing the subject, for he observed that her cheek was again very

pale. "I think we shall both enjoy it more than usual to-day, and a little fresh air will revive you. Let me see," said he, looking at his watch with a smile, as Emily rose to go and get ready, "I will endure your absence for just five minutes, and no more."

Lord Errington had said truly. The drive that day to both was far more than usually enjoyable; and on her return home, Emily for the first time acknowledged, even to herself, that it had been so.

CHAPTER IX.

THE Morton family quitted London the day but one after. Lord Errington took his departure at the same time for Trentham Abbey, whence, early in the ensuing week, he was to join the family party at Bentley Priory, where it had been arranged that the marriage should take place.

As Lord Errington's nearest relative, Mandeville had of course been invited

to the wedding, and for an instant the desire was strong within him to stifle every better feeling for the gratification of exhibiting his indifference on the occasion; but it was only for an instant. His good genius came to his aid, and an excuse so carefully framed as to appear perfectly adequate, was duly returned to the invitation. Some comments there were indeed on his absenting himself on any pretence whatever on such an occasion; but not one, save Emily herself, gave him credit for any particularly amiable motive for so doing. Charles Grenville pronounced him spoony for being so over head and ears in love that he could not leave Blanche Thornham for a single day. Sir Geoffry Charlton, on the same score, voted him the most persevering fortune-hunter, and the most intol-

erable bore that had ever crossed his unlucky path; and Sir William Wrexham, and even his kind-hearted wife, silently decided that Mr. Mandeville's character as a heartless coquette was, in their opinion, now fully established. So true is it that those who permit themselves to depart from the straight path are ever liable to have their best actions misinterpreted.

The acute mental suffering which Mandeville had so often been the instrument of inflicting on others, but which had now for the first time recoiled upon himself, was, in fact, gradually working out its intended purpose, and effecting a total and salutary change in his character. Alas! for poor human nature. He had been made to feel for himself, and in so doing was learning to feel for others. But the struggle between

good and evil was not yet past. Pride, vanity, love, and all the attendant elements of discord wherewith the mighty strife of passion is maintained in the human heart, had in their turns assailed and mastered every better feeling. At one moment, he would resolve to fly to Emily's presence, and, regardless of her existing engagement with his cousin, pour forth at her feet the history of his love. Then again, his natural pride of heart would rise up against the semblance of concession, and the reception he might experience. During the short period of his stay, his demeanour should be as cold and unbending as her own; he would then quit England and never see her more. But pride and love both gave way before the overpowering influence of wounded vanity. He had

never been contemned before. It was unendurable to be so. Mandeville remained in London, enchained less by the attraction of Emily's presence than by the unacknowledged wish of retaining that hold on her affections of which absence might have deprived him. In his conduct both to herself and others, there was meanwhile no apparent change. He had the same bland smile, the same easy address. It would have been impossible to detect a trace of the various passions which were struggling for the mastery within him. Towards Blanche Thornham, indeed, some change of manner might have been perceptible, but that only when Emily was present to witness it. There was then an unusual assiduity; there was the same look and the same smile

with which *she* had learned to be so familiar.

"Happy Blanche!" was her inward ejaculation, as she first witnessed the sparkling eye and the heightened colour with which these tokens were received. But the sharp instrument of torture was gradually losing its powers of infliction.

"Poor Blanche! she knows not the misery she is entailing upon herself," came at last to be Emily's reflection.

Let our warmest affections be once robbed of the safe and solid basis of esteem, and they will stand on a perilous footing. The lighter qualities may attract, but it is the better and nobler that can alone retain affection.

It was no doubt in a moment of unusual irritation that the thought first flashed

across Mandeville's mind of proclaiming to the world (if indeed they had ever had a suspicion on the subject), but above all to Emily herself, his indifference towards her, by announcing himself as the suitor of Blanche Thornham. But the idea, having once arisen, came by frequent recurrence to assume a more tangible form, in the shape of divers self-questionings as to the amount of sacrifice which the gratification of his pique might demand. Blanche was beautiful, and distinguished-looking, and rich, but then her birth was far inferior to his own, and in Mandeville the pride of ancestry amounted to a positive failing. In his feelings towards her there was not a particle of anything deeper than mere personal admiration, for he could not conceal from himself that his whole heart and soul were

still devoted to another; but there was no possibility of doubting the nature of her sentiment towards him. Miss Morton, while still in his presence, had slighted his love, and passively consented to receive the addresses of another; but Blanche's regard had withstood the test both of time and absence. There was yet balm in Gilead, if not for his love, at least for his vanity. It would be a crowning act of triumph to display to Emily that her power had passed away to another—to convince her that he cared as little for her as she could possibly do for him. And yet, somehow or other, though his indignation towards her had not a whit abated, his indifference towards Blanche seemed, if possible, more fixed than ever; and though he might have been well

enough pleased to mislead others, yet he shrank from the idea of allowing himself to be hurried into any step so decided as that which a moment of ungovernable pique had first suggested. As to Blanche, he never paused to reflect what might be the consequence to her. To do him justice, he neither planned nor dreamed of any serious mischief; regarding her rather as a beautiful butterfly, now resting on this flower, and now on that, and too volatile to retain any very deep or lasting impression of any.

Almost everyone had now left town. The Grenvilles were to take their departure the ensuing week for Bentley Priory, to be present at Emily's wedding, at which the sisters were to officiate as bridesmaids, and from whence they were to proceed

to Brighton for the winter. Their brother's battalion of the Guards had just marched there, and the consequently enlarged prospect of balls, beaux, and gaieties of all sorts, was proportionately delightful. Charles Grenville had done what he could to persuade Mr. Thornham to join the party, for what especial reason it would have been rather difficult, either for himself or any one else, to have decided; so had his sisters, in the belief that that delightful, handsome Mr. Mandeville would necessarily follow. He would be inimitable as a cavalier. A wedding, perhaps, might be the result, but on this point poor Laura Grenville kept her thoughts carefully to herself. One thing only was certain in the present state of affairs—no Thornhams, no Mandeville. It must be *tout ou rien.*

Mrs. Thornham's answers to all queries were, however, too evasive to lead to any conclusion on the subject of her intentions; the fact being that at that moment circumstances which could not be made the subject of general discussion could alone regulate her movements. Blanche was equally inaccessible, for, though she would not have confessed it for the world, Brighton, just then, with its balls, beaux, and beau monde, offered no attraction whatever to her imagination. London—desolate, dingy, suffocating London, which, on her first arrival, she had pronounced unendurable—contained all that her utmost wishes could desire. But Blanche never ventured to avow such an evidence of bad taste. She always managed to escape very cleverly from the questionings by which she was assailed,

though very naturally certain inferences were deduced from her professed indifference on the subject.

"I wish you would make up your mind to come to Brighton," said Laura Grenville, one morning, as she sat with Blanche in the drawing-room at Crawley's, where Lady Wrexham had left her, having in her place carried off Mrs. Thornham on a shopping expedition, from which the two girls had very gladly excused themselves—"it is so gay—so delightful."

"I daresay it is," said Blanche; "but it does not exactly depend on myself. The Wrexhams have invited us with them to Rock Castle, and very probably mamma will go there."

"You will have a large party, will you not?" inquired Sir Geoffry Charlton, who,

to Blanche's great annoyance, had been inadvertently admitted.

"Did I not hear that Mandeville was going over, too?"

"I am sure I don't know," replied Blanche, coldly.

"What is it that keeps him away from this wedding that all the world is talking about?" persisted Sir Geoffry.

"He is obliged to join Lady Emmeline at Brussels, I believe," said Laura.

"One day could make no great difference to her ladyship, on such an occasion, one would think; and she can hardly be afraid now of his carrying off the prize from his rich cousin."

"I daresay such an idea never entered Lady Emmeline's head," said Blanche, colouring involuntarily; "and if it had, I

do not see what there was to be afraid of."

"No, indeed; Miss Morton is most charming," said Sir Geoffry, with due regard to the presence of Emily's cousin, and rising at the same time to take his departure.

"Did you ever see such an intolerable coxcomb," exclaimed Blanche, as the door closed.

"He certainly is very tiresome," said Laura, who had never thought Sir Geoffry so disagreeable before.

"Tiresome!" exclaimed Blanche, whose expressions were never very measured, "he is the most odious creature I ever met. I wish he would leave that great frightful ring at home when he comes here. Do you not hate to see men bedizened with

rings, and chains, and brooches, just like women?"

Laura laughed.

"But what could he mean about Lady Emmeline and Mr. Mandeville?" she ventured to say, unable to restrain the curiosity burning within her.

"I do not suppose he meant anything at all," said Blanche, colouring a little. "I have observed that he takes particular delight in saying odd and disagreeable things, without any apparent motive for doing so."

"It never struck me before; but it certainly does seem rather odd that he should refuse to go to Emily's wedding. You know he is Lord Errington's nearest relation," persisted Laura.

"Not at all," said Blanche. "Lady Emmeline has written to him to be at Brussels

on a particular day—some *fête* at Court, I fancy; and he does not like to disappoint her. I heard him tell mamma so yesterday."

"Well, but I agree with Sir Geoffry that one day could make no great difference."

Blanche thought so, too, but she kept her opinion prudently to herself. At all events, she thought Mandeville had very sufficient reasons for preferring spending his last days in England in London.

"I dare say we should never have thought about it," pursued she carelessly, "if Sir Geoffry had not put it into our heads. I am sure I don't know how they came to let him in to-day, when mamma is out; and, by the bye, I may as well at once tell Carlo to be more careful in future;" and

suiting the action to the word, she rose and rang the bell.

"Carlo, if—" anybody, Blanche was going to say, but she remembered in time that *somebody* might be included in too sweeping a clause of exclusion—"if Sir Geoffry Charlton should call again while mamma is out, say I am not visible."

"Bene, Signorina," and away went Carlo, in great glee, to communicate to Meeses Smit, that their young lady had certainly refused Sir Geoffry Charlton, for that in future he was to be denied admittance.

"Ha! ha! I am vera please. I not like him at all. Vera glad she send him away wid flea in ear;" and Carlo chuckled vastly, while enforcing his argument by one of the choice phrases borrowed from the vocabulary of his inamorata.

Characters are often much more justly estimated by inferiors than people are themselves aware of. A good man, even though he be a stern master, will almost invariably be spoken of with respect by his dependants, for truth finds its way into the servants' hall in many a house where it is banished from the drawing-room. In like manner, if we would judge of the domestic qualities of the mistress of a family, let us listen to the comments of her dependants, and mark the interior arrangements of her domestic concerns. A happy and well-regulated household unerringly betokens the superintendence of a good and well-regulated mind.

CHAPTER X.

When Lady Wrexham and Mrs. Thornham returned from their protracted drive, they found Mandeville in the drawing-room at Crawley's, with Blanche's Neapolitan album open before him. It contained many pleasant reminiscences of bygone days, most of the scenes having become familiarized to Blanche while in his society, and all the engravings had been selected

under his superintendence. To Blanche her Neapolitan album constituted in fact a kind of journal; the details of which were so carefully registered, and so often referred to, that they had gradually become as familiar to her as her breviary. Apparently Mandeville's memory had been equally tenacious, for as he turned over page after page, there was not a scene which did not seem to recall the particular circumstances with which it was connected, though frequently it was by a simple word, a smile, a look, or an indication of the finger alone, that the chain of thought thus awakened was made manifest to Blanche's comprehension.

"Ha! here is beautiful Frascati," said he; "what a pleasant trip that was Miss Thornham. And here is the picturesque old

ruin," and he pointed to the fragment of a temple in which Blanche and himself, having by some chance, for which at the time she could not very well account, lost sight of the rest of the party, had sat down to rest and gather violets for a full half-hour.

"Do you remember that beautiful sonnet of Lorenzo di Medici, in which he accounts for the purple colour of the violet?" said Mandeville, looking up at Blanche, while his finger still rested on the ruined temple.

"No—yes—at least I remember your repeating it to me. And there was a translation by Roscoe, too."

"Oh, do let me hear it," said Laura Grenville; "I am afraid I understand Italian too imperfectly to enjoy the original."

"Nediamo," said Mandeville; and then,

in the clear melodious tone for which his voice was so remarkable, he began;—

"Not from the verdant garden's cultur'd bound,
That breathes of Pæstum's aromatic gale,
We sprung; but nurslings of the lonely vale,
'Midst woods obscure and native glooms, were found,
Midst woods and glooms, whose tangled brakes around
Once Venus sorrowing trac'd, as all forlorn
She sought Adonis, when a lurking thorn
Deep in her foot impress'd an impious wound.
Then prone to earth we bowed our pallid flow'rs
And caught the drops divine; the purple dyes
Tinging the lustre of our native hue;
Nor summer gales, nor art-conducted showers,
Have nursed our slender forms, but lovers' sighs
Have been our gales, and lovers' tears our dew."

"And then," said Blanche, "there was one in French you used to repeat, on a rose. Miss Grenville understands both that and Italian, I assure you; so you need not hunt for a translation."

"By Parny? Yes, I remember; but you have answered too soon for my memory, for I have forgotten the lines;" and Mandeville turned to Laura as he spoke, with one of those bland smiles which made her think him, if possible, more handsome and fascinating than ever. "There is another on the same subject, which is rather a curiosity by the way, for it is by the famous, or rather infamous, Maximilian Robespierre."

"It must be, indeed, a curiosity," said Blanche. "I did not know he was a poet. Will you write it in my album?"

"With pleasure. Shall I do so now?"

"By all means, or you may forget it."

"You are unjust, bella Bianca, to fancy that possible," whispered Mandeville, as he followed Blanche to the other table, to

assist in the transport of writing materials.

"Where shall I write?" asked he, seating himself at the table near Miss Grenville; and Blanche having placed the book before him, he inscribed the following lines:—

"La rose était pâle jadis,
Et moins chère à Zéphyr,
A la blancheur des lis,
Elle cédait l'empire;
Mais un jour Bacchus,
Au sein de Vénus,
Prend la fille de Flore,
La plongeant soudain
Dans des flots de vin,
De pourpre il la colore."

"It has no particular beauty or originality," said Mandeville, handing the book to Blanche; "but the name of the author renders it rather a curiosity," and he turned

to Miss Grenville, while Blanche was occupied in reading.

"You have never been in Italy?" inquired he.

"Unfortunately, never."

"Say fortunately rather. I envy anyone whose first impressions of that charming country are yet to come."

"No one should ever judge from first impressions, Mr. Mandeville," said Blanche, looking up with one of her brightest smiles. "Do you remember my first impressions of London—how dingy and disagreeable I thought it?"

"If we are to believe Sir Geoffry Charlton," said Laura, unconscious of the mine she was springing, one's liking never depends on the place, but on the people one meets there."

"Sir Geoffry is an evidence against his own argument," exclaimed Blanche. "If my liking of London depended on the people I met there, I should certainly detest it most cordially, simply because he was in it."

Mandeville laughed. "Poor Charlton!" said he, "what has he done to incur your displeasure? Something very unintentional, I am sure."

"Oh, very likely, for there are some people who cannot, for the life of them, help being disagreeable."

"This is the way we are all abused, I suppose, when our backs are turned," said Mandeville, laughing. "Of course, I come in for my share with the rest."

"To be sure you do," said Blanche. "It is our privilege, and a very fair one.

It would be very hard if we might not speak the truth sometimes."

"May I see the lines on the rose?" said Laura, glad of an excuse to hide her confusion at what seemed to her matter-of-fact way of thinking very plain speaking.

"For my part, I would rather have the truth spoken in my presence than in my absence. I like to know what people think of me," said Mandeville, looking up at Blanche with one of his own peculiar smiles while Miss Grenville was reading.

Blanche coloured. "Well, on one point, I can satisfy you," said she, endeavouring to conceal a slight embarrassment under her own light, thoughtless manner. "Sir Geoffry Charlton thinks you a very unnecessarily dutiful son, for staying away from Lord Errington's wedding."

For a second, Mandeville was surprised out of his usual self-possession. His eye flashed, his lip curled, his head was drawn proudly up.

"Sir Geoffry Charlton is infinitely obliging to trouble himself about my concerns," said he, in a tone of cold sarcasm, while he smoothed the satin fold under his chin, in the manner peculiar to him when particularly vexed about anything.

Laura Grenville was dumbfounded. So, for once in her life, was Blanche. Neither, probably, for some minutes, would have had courage to break the spell, but Mandeville next moment set all right by turning to Miss Grenville, and addressing her with the same easy *nonchalance* as before.

"It will be a very gay affair, I conclude," said he. "When do you leave town, Miss Grenville?"

"On Monday, I believe," said Laura, much relieved.

"Ah, indeed! I was not aware it was to be so soon."

"Wednesday is the day fixed for the wedding," pursued Laura, perfectly unconscious of the torture she was inflicting.

At that moment Mandeville dropped his glove, and stooped to pick it up.

"By this day week there will not be a soul in London that one knows," said Blanche, who felt inclined to be a little pettish, without very well knowing why. "I daresay I shall find out that it is quite as dull and disagreeable as it seemed the first day I came."

What so welcome to a flirt, whether male or female, as that particular manner and intonation which betray that the sys-

tem works well. The words and the tone of Blanche's voice were at that moment peculiarly gratifying to Mandeville's ears. He smiled, but it was a faint, bitter smile.

"Then why stay?" said he in his sweetest tone.

"Why, indeed! I think I shall persuade mamma to go at once with Sir William and Lady Wrexham to Rock Castle. I am sure Sir William is right; we should find it much pleasanter than staying, like the last rose of summer, in this great wilderness."

Blanche had made an unfortunate allusion, though she did not know it. That most beautiful old air was an especial favourite with Emily Morton. She sung it with exquisite pathos, and had done so times without number at Mandeville's request.

A momentary shade passed across his brow.

"That must be Lady Wrexham, I think," said Laura Grenville, as a carriage stopped at the door, much to her satisfaction, for she was beginning to feel sadly in the way, and she rose and went to the window.

"Cosa è," whispered Mandeville, seizing Blanche's hand with a gentle pressure, as they both stood up at the same moment with Miss Grenville.

"Niente, niente," said she, carelessly shaking back her long black silken ringlets —but the hand was allowed passively to be retained for the full half minute that Laura's head was turned the other way.

"No, it is the Courtneys. They are

putting in P.P.C. cards, I suppose," said Laura, drawing back from the window, and in a moment Blanche was at the other side, concealed behind the curtain, and looking furtively at the open barouche, with its elaborate decorations, of which the gorgeously arrayed figures of Lady Courtney, and the young lady beside her, constituted the most prominent objects.

"Miss Courtney is really a very pretty girl, if she were not so overdressed," said Blanche, as Miss Polly threw herself back on the crimson silk cushions of her aunt's carriage, unconscious of the eyes that were upon her.

"No, no, I cannot allow that," said Mandeville. "Nothing could be pretty, so totally devoid of manner. She is amazingly amusing though;" and at that moment

Lady Wrexham's carriage drove up, and a short colloquy ensued, which was distinctly audible through the open window to the invisible trio above.

"Aunt! aunt!—here's Lady Wrexham and Mrs. Thornham. Was ever such luck? Look—do look!—oh, my! what a love of a bonnet," was Miss Polly's exclamation, as the Wrexham liveries drew near at the very moment the footman came to the carriage-door for further orders.

"How de do? how de do? I am so glad to have met you," said Lady Courtney, when the carriages were sufficiently near for her to speak. "I was just going to call to beg your ladyship would convey our very best wishes on a certain interesting occasion. We are very—very old friends, you know," and Lady Courtney smiled sig-

nificantly, and nodded her head, till every feather in her elaborate plume shook again.

"You are very kind, thank you; I shall not fail to do so," said Lady Wrexham, with some difficulty repressing a smile, and not very desirous of prolonging the dialogue.

"We shall not ourselves be within reach of Trentham Abbey for some time," pursued Lady Courtney, pompously; "we are going to take my young lady here a little trip into Scotland."

"Oh, indeed! That will be very nice. We shall have the pleasure of meeting then again next season;" and Lady Wrexham's bow was so decidedly one of farewell, that poor Lady Courtney had nothing for it but to bow in return, and bid the servants drive on.

"Aunt, aunt, the cake—the wedding-cake you promised me!" exclaimed Polly, in a very audible tone, at the same time seizing Lady Courtney's pea-green satin sleeve with one hand, and stretching out the other to the check-string.

But Lady Courtney's intention of fulfilling the promise alluded to by her niece had been nipped in the bud by that parting bow. The carriage drove off, while one bonnet was seen to shake, and the other to toss, till feathers and flowers in each seemed parting from their solid centre; but the young lady's lamentations over the lost cake, and the "capital fun of dreaming for a husband," were lost to the laughing auditory who had been so innocently let into the secret of poor Polly's disappointment.

"Dear Lady Wrexham, do be merciful,"

said Blanche, laughing, as she and Mrs. Thornham entered the room.

"Pray contrive to send poor Miss Courtney some wedding-cake, or she will never survive it."

"Very well, dear. I will send you some, and you may distribute it as you please," said Lady Wrexham, laughing in her turn. "I have but a minute to stay," she added, "for I have still fifty things to do before dinner."

"And you go to-morrow?"

"Yes; but I shall be back in ten days, and then we are all to go together to Rock Castle. Mrs. Thornham and I have settled it all."

"How kind you are," said Blanche, quietly, and without evincing any particular joy at the arrangement which, five minutes be-

fore, she had herself proposed. The truth was, that at that moment she did not like the idea of going to Rock Castle at all.

"Well, Mr. Mandeville," said Lady Wrexham, turning towards him with her usual gaiety of manner, and perhaps secretly desirous of testing the motives for his present conduct, which it would have given her real pleasure to have placed in as amiable a light as possible, "what message am I to convey for you to Bentley? You are really very perverse, I think, to stay away on such an occasion."

"My regrets and best wishes," answered Mandeville, bowing graciously, but more stiffly than was his custom."

"Then you really will not come?" persisted Lady Wrexham, provokingly.

"Impossible"—and another bow, rather

stiffer than the last, filled up the sentence.

Blanche's dark eye for a moment flashed, and her lip curled, though it would have been difficult for her to have said why; but the next moment a blush and a smile told Mandeville that she had interpreted, as he intended she should, the motive for his desire to remain in London till the last moment.

"Well then, dear Blanche, God bless you," said Lady Wrexham, kissing her affectionately, *à la Française*, on both cheeks. "I shall write and tell you all about it.—We have no chance of meeting again till next season, I suppose," to Mandeville.

"I fear not."

"My best remembrance to Lady Emmeline, then, though really we owe her a

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CHAPTER XI.

EVERYTHING was now bustle and preparation at Bentley. Even the neighbouring little village of Allington shared the general fever of expectation, for Mrs. Morton, in the pride of her heart, had resolved that her daughter's marriage with the heir apparent of Trentham Abbey should be solemnized with all possible *éclat*, an arrangement in which her husband, from

motives not very dissimilar, and a natural easiness of disposition, readily acquiesced.

The Grenvilles, with Lady Wrexham, Aunt Dorothy, and Gertrude, were already arrived, and what with the addition of Lord and Lady Allington, Sir Charles and Lady Caroline Douglas, Sir Henry Gordon and Colonel Beaumont of the Life Guards, invited at the special request of Charles Morton, who had just fallen desperately in his first love with the sister of the former, the lady of Bentley managed to convert poor Emily's misnamed quiet wedding into an affair quite brilliant enough to fill up an admirable paragraph in the *Morning Post.*

Only the immediate relatives of the Morton family had, however, as yet arrived. The rest, including Lord Erring-

ton himself, whose departure from Trentham had been delayed a few days, in consequence of the slight illness of his father, were to make their appearance on the day preceding that fixed for the wedding.

Every preparation, meanwhile, went on as smoothly as Mrs. Morton's anxious heart could desire. The Brussels lace wedding-dress, thanks to her prudent foresight, arrived in due time, and was pronounced perfect. Emily's *trousseau* exceeded in beauty and costliness, not only that of Lady Harriet Cartleton, who had married the poor attaché with his six hundred a-year, but even (at least, so told the flattering tale of a no less important personage than Vouillant herself) that of the beautiful daughter of the Duchess of Waterton, who had—all for love—just

insisted on bestowing herself, and her fifty thousand pounds, on a remarkably handsome, black-eyed, black-moustached foreign prince, in exchange for the red-hot love, and the penniless principality, which were all he, poor man, had to offer in return.

"A very different match from our Emmy's," observed Mrs. Morton, as, on the morning after Aunt Dorothy's arrival, they sat together in her *boudoir*, where the whole detail of settlements and other arrangements had been the pleasing subject of discussion.

"It is indeed, Laura; I most sincerely congratulate you."

"How do you think Emily is looking?" inquired Mrs. Morton, who, despite her multiplied avocations, had had many

anxious moments since her return to Bentley.

"Dear child! She is looking very pretty, but very delicate, I think. But then a London season is so trying," said Aunt Dorothy, kindly.

"Oh, yes—the hot rooms and the late hours; and she was so much admired, I could scarcely keep her at home a single night."

"Oh, well, the wedding tour will soon bring back her roses," observed Aunt Dorothy, whose mode of thinking on some points was too widely different from that of her sister-in-law to admit of discussion.

The evening previous to the expected arrival of all the wedding guests was now come. Lord Errington was to arrive on

the following morning, and the day after was fixed for the wedding. At the earnest entreaty of Carry and Georgy, the two sisters, on this last day, consented to dine in the schoolroom with the children at their own early hour, an arrangement in which both Emily and Gertrude very gladly acquiesced.

"Dear little Carry, she does not know how much I am obliged to her," said Emily. "We shall have a few quiet hours all to ourselves. It seems as if I had still so many things to say to you, dear Gertrude."

"You must write to me, dear, and tell me all you see and hear—a kind of journal; your letters will be such treasures. Besides," added she, smiling, "you know the continent is quite a *terra incognita*

to me, so they will have a double interest."

"Ah, but it is so different," said Emily; "there are so many things one cannot put on paper."

"I should like very much," continued she, after a moment's pause, "to go down and see poor old Nurse Gray once more. Let us walk to the village while they are all at dinner."

And, accordingly, no sooner was the party safely seated in the dining-room than the sisters set out across the park towards the cottage of the old woman, which was situated just at the entrance of the little village of Bentley. It had been selected by Emily herself, and furnished, under her superintendence, with every regard to the comfort and declining years

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Nurse Gray, very glad of an excuse to show mercy, but thinking it requisite to maintain the dignity of her station.

"Well, I will promise for her this time," said Emily. "You will be a good child, Mary, and learn your task better to-morrow, will you not?"—and she drew the child towards her, and bent her head close to the little crimson cheek, to catch the answer. "Nurse, may I take off this ugly cap?"

"Yes, Miss Emmy, for this once,"—and Emily removed the cap, much to poor Mary's relief, whose swollen eyes and scarlet cheeks gave evidence of all she had been suffering.

"There now, children, go and play, and thank Miss Emily for being so good to you," said the old lady; and the next moment every curtsey was dropped, and the children

were bounding away in high glee; all save the one little offender, who, with heavy steps and downcast looks, still lingered on her way, apparently too much cast down to take any pleasure in the frolics of her companions.

"I wanted to see you once more, dear nurse," said Emily, seating herself on a little stool at her nurse's feet, while Gertrude, whose long absence from Bentley had given her the second, as Emily held the first place in the old woman's heart, took a chair beside her. "We dined with Carry and Georgy in the school-room to-day, and so, while the rest were at dinner, Gertrude and I have stolen down to pay you a visit."

"That was very kind of you, dear child."

"We shall all be too busy to-morrow,

and it may be so long, so very long before I see you again."

"Well, dear child, you are going with a good husband to take care of you. I've heard a deal about him, more than you think for, Miss Emmy."

"Dear nurse, pray do not call me Miss Emmy now."

"I shall have to call you my lady afore it's long," said the old woman, with a smile of proud affection, as she stroked the long silken curls of her child's head, "and well enough I shall like it. Them fine quality folk, when they are bad, are far worse and more harmful than all beside, because you know, dear child, all they say, and all they do, is more looked on than with us poor bodies; and a crying sin it is when they go the wrong way, and do lead us

to follow 'em; but when they're good, like as *he* is, then they're a shining light, and a pride and pleasure to look on."

"I will try and be good, too, that I may deserve all you say, dear nurse," said Emily; "and when I am a great lady, you must come and see how I behave; only remember, I am never to be anything but little Emmy to you, as long as I live."

"Well, well—we'll see, we'll see," said the old woman. "There will be somebody else to call little Emmy by that time, perhaps."

"Dear nurse, how you talk! Do you really think you will not be able to come up to the house on Wednesday?"

"No, no; I shall be better away. An old woman like me has no business among all them gay doings. I shall go to the

church and see you there instead. I shall like it better, because, you know, dear child, I can pray to God to bless you, and to bless him, too, for your sake, far better in God's own house, than I could up yonder in the house o' feastin'."

There was something peculiarly touching in the old woman's affectionately sorrowful manner as she once more laid her hand on the head of her child, and the big tears rushed up into Emily's eyes.

"I could be a'most sorry that you were going away from us among them ungodly foreign folk, Emmy," pursued Nurse Gray, "for I've heard tell that the devil's among 'em like a rampaging and a roaring lion; but you'll have one with you that'll take care of you, so I'm not afraid."

"I hope you will have no occasion to be

afraid for me, dear nurse," said Emily, smiling at Nurse Gray's exaggerated notions of the dangers which threatened her.

"Take an old woman's word, Emmy, child, and think on it when you're far away. Keep the fear o' God always afore your eyes, and have but one heart with your husband, and I shan't be afraid of nothing for you. If a wife has a clean heart afore God, and a true one wi' her husband, she need never be shamefaced when he looks at her."

How long good old Nurse Gray would have allowed the stream of her eloquence to run on in its favourite channel, it would have been extremely difficult to tell, had not the setting of the sun reminded both herself and the two sisters that they had yet to cross the park on their way home-

wards. It was a sad parting, for the old woman was beginning to feel the infirmities of age creeping upon her, and Emily was going, as she herself had said, far away over the sea; and who could tell whether they should ever meet again on this side the grave? But though Emily's tears were fast falling, as she threw her arms around her nurse's neck to bid her farewell, yet Nurse Gray wiped away those which had gathered in her own eyes, and composed her voice as well as she was able.

"You must take heart, dear child," said she, "and meet my lord with a smiling face to-morrow. You did well to smile on him, Emmy; for he's a good man and worthy of you, and that's saying something of him any day. Miss Gertrude will come and tell me all about you while you're

away, and you'll come back yourself all in good time, please God."

"I hope so, dear nurse."

"Ay, ay—so now go home, and pick up your roses for to-morrow. God bless you, dear child, wherever you be, and make you as happy as you deserve to be," and the old woman took her stick, and hobbled to the door of her cottage, and stood wiping her eyes with the corner of her white apron, that she might gaze after the sisters till the park trees hid them from her sight.

"What a mockery it is to attempt to make a wedding a gay affair," said Emily, as they retraced their steps homewards.

"It would not do to have it a sad one," said Gertrude, affecting a cheerfulness which she did not feel. "Which way are you going, dear?" she continued, observing

that Emily was turning into a narrow path that led by a more circuitous route to the house. "Do you not think, as it is so late, we had better go by the shorter way, through the avenue?"

"I must see our little garden once again, dear Gertrude, and it will not make five minutes difference"—and Gertrude silently acquiesced; but she quickened her pace, for the dew was fast falling, and Emily had been unusually susceptible of cold lately.

"How can a wedding be anything but sad, at least to many of those concerned," said Emily, returning to the subject as they walked on together, "though people may think it necessary to appear otherwise. I do not think I ever loved my home so well, Gertrude, as I do now, when I am on the very eve of quitting it—perhaps for ever."

"You are out of spirits to-night, dearest," said Gertrude, affectionately drawing her sister's arm within her own.

"There is something so sad," continued Emily, her eyes filling with tears, "in going away from the home of one's childhood to a strange place, and among strange people, without a single dear old face to which one has been accustomed. How strange it is, Gertrude, when people can endure the snapping asunder of so many ties, and yet not feel it."

"I do not wonder you should feel it, my own dear sister; but then, you know," said Gertrude, forcing a smile, "the separation in your case will be but temporary, and you have so many redeeming points of happiness"

"I know it, I know it; I shall find it

all out in time," said Emily, interrupting her; "but, at the moment, one thinks of nothing but the separation from all one has loved so long and so well. Let us sit down for a few minutes," continued she, as they reached a rustic seat in the little garden, which, half-hidden, far away in the plantations, had been left to her own and Gertrude's especial cultivation from their childhood.

"One may love and be loved quite as well at a distance, dear Emmy," said Gertrude, "and we have still our pens to talk with, you know."

Emily made no reply, for there was an oppression on her spirits, which she vainly struggled to shake off.

"I sometimes envy people that never feel or think about anything," said she,

endeavouring to rouse herself at last. "It must be such a delightful state of feeling. One could never be anxious or unhappy then."

"Nor the reverse. Such a state of inanition could never deserve the name of happiness," said Gertrude, attempting to generalize the subject.

"Well, perhaps so; but there are some people who feel deeply, and yet seem to take things so lightly. Do you remember Caroline's wedding—how careless and light-hearted she appeared even to the last moment?"

"To be sure, dear," said Gertrude, endeavouring, by the cheerfulness of her manner, to conquer the unusual depression of her sister. "She knew she was going to be very happy, and so are you, dearest

Emmy; I must not have you see everything *en noir* instead of *en rose.* Why, to hear you talk, one would think marriage a very miserable affair indeed," said she, smiling. "What would Lord Errington say if he heard you?"

"He would say everything that is good and kind, I know," said Emily, bursting into tears, and laying her head on her sister's shoulder. "I know all you would say to me, dear Gertrude," she continued. "I ought to conquer this depression—it is wrong and unreasonable; but the truth is, I have had a distracted headache the whole day. And after all," she added, raising her head from her sister's shoulder, and endeavouring to smile as she wiped away her tears, "you will allow that it is natural one should think

more seriously than usual on that which is to make the happiness or misery of a whole life. It is all very well, dear Gertrude, to talk carelessly about it, as you and I used to do in former days, but when it comes so near—so very near, one begins to remember that marriage is indeed and in truth an affair of life and death, for is it not *for* the one, and *till* the other?"

She rose as she spoke, and Gertrude once more drawing Emily's arm affectionately through her own, they walked on towards the house. Neither felt disposed to join the gay party in the drawing-room, an exertion for which indeed Emily felt quite unequal; and the sisters therefore made their escape to their own room, and, at Gertrude's suggestion, retired early to rest.

Gertrude awoke at daylight the next

morning, for anxiety had made her watchful. She raised her head quietly from the pillow, to ascertain if Emily were sleeping; but the quick feverish breathing which reached her ear was rather that of disturbed slumber than of repose. Gertrude raised herself gently, and bent over to the other side, to catch a glimpse, if possible, of her sister's averted face, as it lay buried in the pillow. The cheek was crimson, the eyelid heavy, the lips unclosed, parched and fevered. She raised the hand which lay on the coverlid — it was like a coal of fire. In a moment Gertrude, without awakening her sister, had disengaged herself from the bed-clothes, and, throwing on her dressing-gown and slippers, had hurried to Aunt Dorothy's room.

Before twelve o'clock on that day, all the

guests assembled at Bentley Priory, with the exception of Aunt Dorothy and Gertrude, with Lady Wrexham—who could not be persuaded to leave the house—had taken flight.

Scarlet fever had broken out in the village on the preceding evening, of so virulent a nature that three of Nurse Gray's little pupils, including poor Mary, whose unusual dulness was now fully accounted for, were already given over. Poor little things, in conformity with the custom of the county, they were to have strewed flowers in the bridal path on the very day after — the day appointed for the wedding. When, towards evening, Lord Errington reached Bentley, Emily was no longer sensible of anything that was passing around her. Sir William Wrexham had been written to by

express to hasten from London, accompanied by Dr. Dereham, with all possible despatch —but it was more for the satisfaction of the family than from any well-grounded hope in his superior skill. On the morning which was to have been that of Emily's wedding, the only two medical men within reach had, at Lady Wrexham's earnest request, made known to her their private opinion that unless Dr. Dereham should arrive before evening, he would do so only when all was over.

CHAPTER XII.

It was now the commencement of August. The weather was unusually sultry, and heat, dust, and suffocation were daily rendering London more intolerable, and hastening the work of desertion, which was nearly complete. Still Mrs. Thornham lingered on in Albemarle Street, judging it scarcely worth while to change her residence during the short period of her stay

in England, for Lady Wrexham was perfectly correct in saying that she had promised (conditionally, indeed, on certain circumstances then pending) to meet her and Sir William at Rock Castle, whither they intended proceeding immediately after Emily's marriage. But the whole arrangement had not been made, either by Mrs. Thornham or her kind friends, without deeper reasons than any which they would have chosen to make the subject of general discussion. The long drive with Lady Wrexham, on the morning preceding her departure from London, had been preconcerted, in order that the subject of Mandeville's attentions to Blanche, and the termination towards which they were likely to tend, might be freely spoken of and canvassed between them. With some

surprise, Lady Wrexham now heard for the first time the history of much that, though carefully screened from public observation, had not escaped a mother's watchful eye, and it very naturally led her to incline to Mrs. Thornham's own opinion on the subject. But there were private reasons, to which Lady Wrexham did not think it necessary to refer, but which had been strengthened by Sir William's maturer judgment, that induced her to regard with more doubt than she was very willing to admit, Mandeville's ulterior intentions on the present occasion. Regret for much that was past, still more the sincere interest she took in the happiness of her young friend, determined her at all events to give Mrs. Thornham that timely warning which, in the case of her less sensible

and more worldly aunt, would have been a task almost as difficult as fruitless.

"I will own to you, my ever kind friend," said Mrs. Thornham, "that the object nearest to my heart is to see Blanche happily settled; for I need not tell you that, with a fortune such as hers, which is of course magnified to double its amount, and with her natural volatility of character, she is exposed to a thousand dangers. I learned some lessons on that head abroad, which I hope I shall not soon forget."

"Forgive me, dear Mrs. Thornham, but I think she is exposed to almost as much danger at home; and to be honest with you, this is one reason why Sir William and myself are so anxious to carry you both off with us to Rock Castle."

"Always kind, dear Lady Wrexham; but I think Blanche's fate will be decided before you return to town, in which case we may be compelled to alter our plans."

"Then Mr. Mandeville *has* proposed," exclaimed Lady Wrexham, with a glad smile.

"The same thing—and I need hardly tell you he is not likely to be refused by either of us. In fact, it is a match I always thought of with pleasure; and now that this marriage of your sweet cousin will bring about a kind of connexion, however distant, with the ever kind friends of my dear child, I have nothing left to desire. Mr. Mandeville is more than all I could wish, except in point of fortune, and of that Blanche has ample for both.

Lady Wrexham was pained at the tone

of certainty in which Mrs. Thornham spoke, and a little uneasy as to how she should proceed. It is so ungracious a task to plant suspicion in the breast of another, more especially when our own hopes and wishes would lead to the belief that that suspicion is unfounded.

"But still I do not see why we are to lose your visit either," said she at last. "We have not directly invited Mr. Mandeville to Rock Castle, but he knows perfectly well he is welcome, and can follow you there if he chooses it.

"He *may* wish us to remain in England, to settle everything; in which case I suppose we must do so."

"Well, in any case, forgive me, dear Mrs. Thornham; I should be glad, I own, that this dangling were put an end to.

You know, or perhaps you do not know, that, with all his good qualities, our friend is a sad flirt, and I should be grieved that dear Blanche's feelings were needlessly harassed."

Mrs. Thornham reflected for a moment.

"After all that has passed, it is not possible to doubt his intentions," said she. "Still you are right; it should be decided, at all events, before he goes abroad, which must be soon."

"Do you know Lady Emmeline?"

"Not at all. He has never named her, which I *have* thought rather singular; but till he had actually proposed, I did not feel justified in doing so."

Lady Wrexham made no reply. From her knowledge of Lady Emmeline's charac-

ter, she felt tolerably certain that her son's marriage with Miss Thornham was one of the very last events to which she would be likely to vouchsafe a gracious consent, if consent she gave at all. There was, in the first place, the difference of religion, a point on which Lady Emmeline was particularly tenacious; and, in the second, what her ladyship would have called the difference of station, for she inherited the accumulated pride of a long line of noble ancestry, and had, moreover, accustomed herself to regard her gifted and admired son as a match meet only for the highest and noblest in the land. And of all this, Lady Wrexham knew that Mandeville must be even better aware than herself; while, at the same time, his devotion to his mother, and his deference to her wishes, had ever formed

one of the most beautiful and redeeming points in his character. On Blanche's first arrival in London, she had, in the innocence of her heart, and in her anxiety for her cousin Emily, jumped to the conclusion that the Neapolitan flirtation would doubtless be renewed, and might be brought to a termination equally satisfactory to all parties. But Lady Wrexham had been made to think much since then, and had arrived at the conviction that even if Mandeville's own intentions were honourable, it was more than probable that his lady mother would place an insuperable barrier between him and the fulfilment of them.

In Mrs. Thornham's mind a great many vague suspicions had, meanwhile, been conjured up; but she met them with that clear judgment, and straightforward plain sense,

which are, of all others, the most useful qualities for carrying us safely through the shoals and quicksands by which every man's passage over life's perilous ocean is more or less beset. They had nearly completed a second tour of the Regent's Park, ere either she or Lady Wrexham broke silence; but when she did so, Mrs. Thornham's resolution was already taken.

"You return to town in ten days, and Mr. Mandeville says he must quit it next week, so that, after all, I do not see what should prevent our going to Ireland," said she. "At all events, will you let me leave it uncertain, for you see I must be guided by circumstances."

And so it was arranged. Lady Wrexham quitted London the following day for Bentley, whither Sir William was prepared

to follow her, having first paid a farewell visit to Mrs. Thornham and Blanche, and reiterated the invitation to Rock Castle, with a few hurried words and a meaning glance to the former, which was all that the presence of her daughter admitted.

The weather was, as I have said, very sultry, and almost everyone had taken flight. Sir Geoffry Charlton, indeed, still continued to endure what he himself called the abomination of London in August, much to the annoyance of both the ladies at Crawley's, to whom, in proportion as his sources of amusement diminished elsewhere, his visits became more lengthened and more frequent. Why he persevered in them, it would have been difficult to tell, unless that an excess of vanity had rendered him imper-

vious to the cold politeness of Mrs. Thornham, the impatience of Blanche, and the undisguised coolness of Mandeville. Or, perhaps, as Blanche herself suggested, he came for the amiable purpose of giving vent to the spleen which seemed always ready to overflow on whatever object was most within reach. Certain it is, however, that, though all affected to despise, none were wholly insensible to the random shafts which, from time to time, Sir Geoffry thought fit to launch with a dexterity worthy of a better cause.

Mandeville, it may be supposed, was a daily visitor at Crawley's, too ; and it rarely happened that some commission to be executed, some drive to be planned, or some other equally well-arranged device, did not find him again, towards evening, in Mrs.

Thornham's drawing-room, where, as a matter of course, he beguiled their idleness and his own, till it was time to retire for the night. And it cannot be denied that Mandeville had never appeared, either to mother or daughter, to so much advantage as he did now. His charm of manner and power of conversation, which, in the whirl and bustle of a London season, might merely have invited comparison with others, were now found an inexhaustible source of gratification and amusement. Even Mrs. Thornham herself, though naturally disposed to view his proceedings with a more watchful eye than her daughter, was not uninfluenced by his fascination, though the only effect it produced on her was to strengthen the resolution at which she had previously arrived.

And Mandeville himself — what were the feelings by which he was all this time actuated? Was it possible, as Mrs. Thornham had fifty times asked herself, that he was seeking only his own amusement, at the expense of Blanche's happiness? No—not quite that. He was not so utterly heartless as to have deliberately planned the ruin of her peace for his mere pastime. There was much of the force of habit in his intimacy with the Thornhams. In the social intercourse of continental life, he had been so much accustomed to walk in at all hours, and to pass every unoccupied evening with them, that his doing so now seemed quite a matter of course, and as much so to them as to himself. There was much in the force of habit, too, with regard to his

especial flirtation with Blanche, and all the sweet nothings he was accustomed to pour into her ear; and much, moreover, in her especial flirtation with him, for Blanche was a most determined flirt; but she was so wholly without premeditation, and in the wild gaiety of a happy heart, on which no cloud of sorrow had ever yet rested. To be serious on any subject for the space of a whole half hour would have been a climax of sobriety which, as she herself declared, would have entitled her to a place in the Teetotal Society; and thus Mandeville's visits were made up of a series of pleasantries and repartee, infinitely amusing to him, and agreeable to her (as, alas! what would not have been in which *he* was concerned?), but the very last thing likely to suggest, still less to

retain, any idea of a more serious nature.

Added to all this, it must be acknowledged that Mandeville did in some sort consult his own gratification in seeking the society of Blanche Thornham much oftener than a little sober reflection would have told him was either kind or prudent. He had been the artificer of more unhappiness for himself than he had ever dreamed of inflicting on others, and had, in fact, wrought his mind up to a pitch of irritation scarcely less than that which at one time Emily herself had endured. Excitement became necessary to him — not the blaze of the world, which, while it involved the task of constant exertion, only added fuel to the flame. In Mrs. Thornham's drawing-room, he could feel perfectly at

home. He could there please without effort to himself, and was always sure of a glad, and, what was better still, a genuine smile of welcome. And though, as we have seen, in a moment of pique, thoughts of a more serious nature had flashed across his mind, followed up by unmistakable evidences of the state of Blanche's feelings, yet a variety of considerations, to say nothing of his own feelings, combined to prevent their assuming a more decided character. Nor did he think it necessary, with one so volatile, to give himself any very particular uneasiness on the subject. And so the season passed over, and came to an end, without one word spoken that could have been construed into a proposal of marriage, but without the omission of a single outward and visible sign to induce

ɜ belief that in due time that one word
ıst necessarily be spoken.

Alas, for the rectitude of purpose or the
ıiable feeling of a male coquette!

CHAPTER XIII.

"THEN you must go to-morrow?"

"I fear so. I shall then only just have time to reach Brussels by Thursday."

Blanche made no reply. A fortnight before, Mandeville had told her of his promise to be at Brussels on a particular day, but she had resolutely determined to disbelieve him, particularly as the day of his departure had been, on various pretexts, three

several times postponed. She was therefore a little unprepared for the present announcement. There was an unpleasant choking sensation in her throat, which she found it difficult to repress; so she remained silent, with her eyes steadily fixed on the Berlin pattern which had for the last three months served her as an apology for work.

"Do you remain the whole winter at Rock Castle?" inquired Mandeville, in his musical voice, as he stooped to pick up a ball of lamb's-wool which had escaped from Blanche's fingers.

"I do not know what mamma will do." Blanche thought the question very unnecessary, seeing that their movements must of course depend on circumstances in which he himself would be the leading point.

"At all events, you will be in London next season?"

Next season! To talk so quietly of the next season, when he, meanwhile, would be on the continent, and she, perhaps, in Ireland.

"I do not know that either. It is too far off to look forward to. Fifty things may happen between this and then."

"La bella Bianca, may have ceased to be Miss Thornham, perhaps."

"There—how tiresome; I have done it all wrong," said Blanche, bending her face over her work, so that her long ringlets entirely concealed it. "These slippers will never be done, that is certain. Mr. Mandeville, will you open that far window? It is so dreadfully hot to-day."

"I thought you were to have given the last sitting for your picture this morning," said Mandeville, resuming, beside Blanche, the seat he had just quitted.

"No—yes—I shall not go, at all events. I am not in a becoming mood to-day, and I do not choose to be handed down as a fright to posterity."

Mandeville smiled a smile of such peculiar meaning, that Blanche's dread of being thought a fright was entirely dispelled by it.

"Oh, do go," said he. "I am so anxious to see it now that it is nearly finished; and the painter is so discreetly exorable, that nothing but the open sesame of your presence will admit me."

"Blanche, my love, it is quite time to go and dress," said Mrs. Thornham, who, with her watch before her, was busy at her writing-table at the other end of the room.

"Bene, mamma mia. What a good, dutiful daughter I am!" exclaimed Blanche,

who, now that Mandeville was to form one of the party, seemed to have forgotten every objection to the fulfilment of her engagement, while the charm of his presence, and the natural buoyancy of a happy heart, appeared to have entirely blotted out the remembrance of what the morrow was to bring forth.

No more time was allowed by Blanche for her toilet than was absolutely necessary for the perfecting of Mrs. Smith's labours; and certainly, when all was completed, and she paused for a moment to bestow one last glance at her mirror, it would have been difficult to find a more lovely reflection than that mirror gave back. Probably some such reflection floated pleasingly through Blanche's own mind, heightening a little the colour in her cheek, and

deepening the smile which played round her small and beautifully-formed mouth. Was it the promptings of gratified vanity that called forth those tokens of self-approval? To a certain extent, probably it was, for Blanche could hardly have escaped entirely that besetting sin, to which, of all others, her beauty and her prospects combined more especially exposed her; but the predominant feeling at that moment was undoubtedly not one in which self bore the prominent part. She valued not beauty, except as it might give her greater interest in *his* eyes, and would willingly have relinquished the admiration of all the world besides, for one approving glance from *him.*

And certainly the unequivocal look of admiration with which he raised his eyes

home. He could there please without effort to himself, and was always sure of a glad, and, what was better still, a genuine smile of welcome. And though, as we have seen, in a moment of pique, thoughts of a more serious nature had flashed across his mind, followed up by unmistakable evidences of the state of Blanche's feelings, yet a variety of considerations, to say nothing of his own feelings, combined to prevent their assuming a more decided character. Nor did he think it necessary, with one so volatile, to give himself any very particular uneasiness on the subject. And so the season passed over, and came to an end, without one word spoken that could have been construed into a proposal of marriage, but without the omission of a single outward and visible sign to induce

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proved, but not to be acquired, any more than the natural perceptions of the poet or the painter—both of whom, though unable, perhaps, to separate cause from effect, yet discover in the beauteous face of nature, a thousand varied shades and combinations utterly imperceptible to others. There had been nothing in Mandeville's manner to attract the notice of a casual observer, and yet, though she knew not its cause, Blanche perceived that a cloud had passed across his mind, and the reflection instantly was communicated to her own. She rose and walked to the window, and Mandeville followed her, as Mrs. Thornham put aside her writing, and passed into the adjoining room for her shawl and bonnet, for the carriage had just driven to the door.

"Why did you never let me see you in

that dress before?" said Mandeville to Blanche, in a more serious tone than he usually employed, and gazing on her with undisguised admiration.

"I am glad you like it," said she, with a bright smile, for his tone and manner had acted on her like a sunbeam; "there was a great debate what it should be, and at last they fixed on this."

"No wonder the painter has lingered so long over his work," said he, in the same tone as before; "but I cannot forgive him for having been such a miser of it."

"I believe the invisibility of this effigy of mine never entered into his calculations. He is obliged to be a miser of his time, to exclude all idle visitors."

"Idle? It would not have been idleness, bella Bianca, that would have taken

me to his studio"—and Mandeville, by a movement that seemed involuntary, took the small white hand near him, and completed the sentence by a gentle pressure of it.

What was coming next, it would have been difficult to tell, but at that moment the door was thrown open, and Sir Geoffry Charlton was announced.

Blanche coloured to the very tips of her fingers. Mandeville dropped her hand, and after the slightest possible salutation that politeness demanded, took up a beautiful little bronze group of Roman Amorini, that was lying on the table, and seemed to be examining their delicate workmanship. Nothing could have been more inopportune than Sir Geoffry's visit; but he appeared perfectly unconscious of any intrusion, and,

without noticing Blanche's undisguised look of annoyance, advanced towards her with his usually self-confident manner.

"Have you heard this dreadful news?" inquired Sir Geoffry, almost before he had given time for her cold greeting.

"What news?" said Blanche, whose thoughts were too much absorbed to take interest in Sir Geoffry's communication, and who felt too much annoyed to listen very particularly to anything he might have to say; while Mandeville, from something of the same feeling, merely looked up from under his eyes, without evincing any particular curiosity on the subject, and still retaining the bronze group in his hand.

"Then you have not seen Sir William Wrexham?"

"No; not since yesterday. I suppose

he is gone out of town," said Blanche, coldly.

"You have not heard that he was written to by express this morning, to hasten at once, with Dr. Dereham, to Bentley? Miss Morton was given over last night."

"Good God!" exclaimed Mandeville, in a tone of concentrated agony, too real to be mistaken, and the bronze group fell from his hand to the ground, shivering the marble pedestal on which it had stood. Sir Geoffry stooped to pick it up, while a peculiar smile passed over his features.

"I saw Sir William, just as he was setting out, half an hour ago," said he, "so I fear the intelligence is too correct to be doubted."

Blanche was unable to speak. She had clasped her hands in horror, at the first

dreadful and unlooked for announcement; but she had not yet uttered a word. Her first impulse had been one of deep grief and anxiety for Emily Morton, of sincere commiseration and sympathy with those to whom she was most dear. There was something so heart-sickening in the idea of that bright, beautiful, and gifted creature, on the very verge of possessing all that could render life desirable, in one moment precipitated from the green things of life into the dark valley of the shadow of death—something so dreadful in the transition from joy to sorrow by which all those to whom she was so dear had been overwhelmed. Such, at the first moment, were the only images which, in all their sad and appalling reality, rose up before the mind of Blanche Thornham. But the tone of Mandeville's voice,

and the incident by which it was succeeded, drew her attention towards him, and she almost started as she turned and beheld the expression of intense suffering depicted on his countenance. Oh, how the dross of earth will cling round even the best and kindest heart! Mandeville was still standing, leaning on the table for support, and as Blanche's eye rested on him, and marked the agonized expression of his countenance, that one glance opening to her view a world of misery and self-deception, of which, till then, she had never dreamed, a pang shot like lightning through her brain, so poignant, that, for an instant, even Emily Morton and the sorrowful tidings she had just received were obliterated. She had been raising up a fabric of hopes and wishes, which the breath of a single instant had destroyed.

As Sir Geoffry Charlton was speaking, Mrs. Thornham entered the room, and it was a relief to more than one of the party that she did so. It gave Mandeville a moment to recover the shock he had sustained, and withdrew the attention of Sir Geoffry from him.

"What has happened?" inquired Mrs. Thornham, perceiving that something was very much amiss.

"Oh, mamma mia!" exclaimed Blanche, in a tone of deep feeling, "you will be so grieved—"

And Sir Geoffry filled up the sentence for her, by repeating the tidings he had just received.

Beyond the bare fact of Emily's illness, very little was known. Lady Wrexham's hurried letter had entered into no particu-

lars. She had been suddenly attacked by fever, her life was despaired of, and Dr. Dereham had been summoned with all possible speed. This was all Sir Geoffry had to communicate; and having done so, contrary to his usual custom, he shortened his visit, and took his leave.

"I knew I should find him there," was his reflection, as he descended the stairs. "Her eyes must be opened now, I think. If they go to Rock Castle, I shall make a tour in Ireland this summer. Wounded game is always most readily taken."

For some minutes after Sir Geoffry's departure, the little party in the drawing-room at Crawley's sat silent and thoughtful, too much shocked at the sad and sudden intelligence which had just reached them, to give vent to their feelings in words. Man-

deville had so far succeeded in recovering himself, as to exhibit no outward demonstration of feeling, beyond that which might very naturally have been expected from anyone on a similar occasion, while Blanche, though her eyes occasionally wandered towards him, was too much absorbed with a variety of painfully mingled feelings to be able to speak.

"This is very sad," said Mrs. Thornham, at last breaking silence. "How soon do you think it possible we may hear further?"

"The Grenvilles may have returned to town," said Mandeville, suddenly starting up, and seizing his hat.

"We will drive there at once," said Mrs. Thornham. "You had better get your bonnet, and put a shawl round you, dear, for we cannot go to the painter's to-day."

And Blanche rose mechanically, and walked into the next room.

When she returned, Mandeville was gone. He had promised to procure any information that could be obtained, and to return in the evening to make known the result.

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